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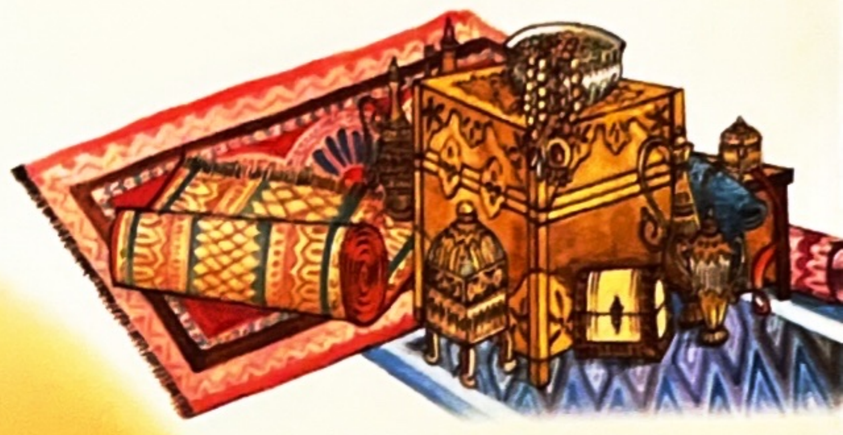
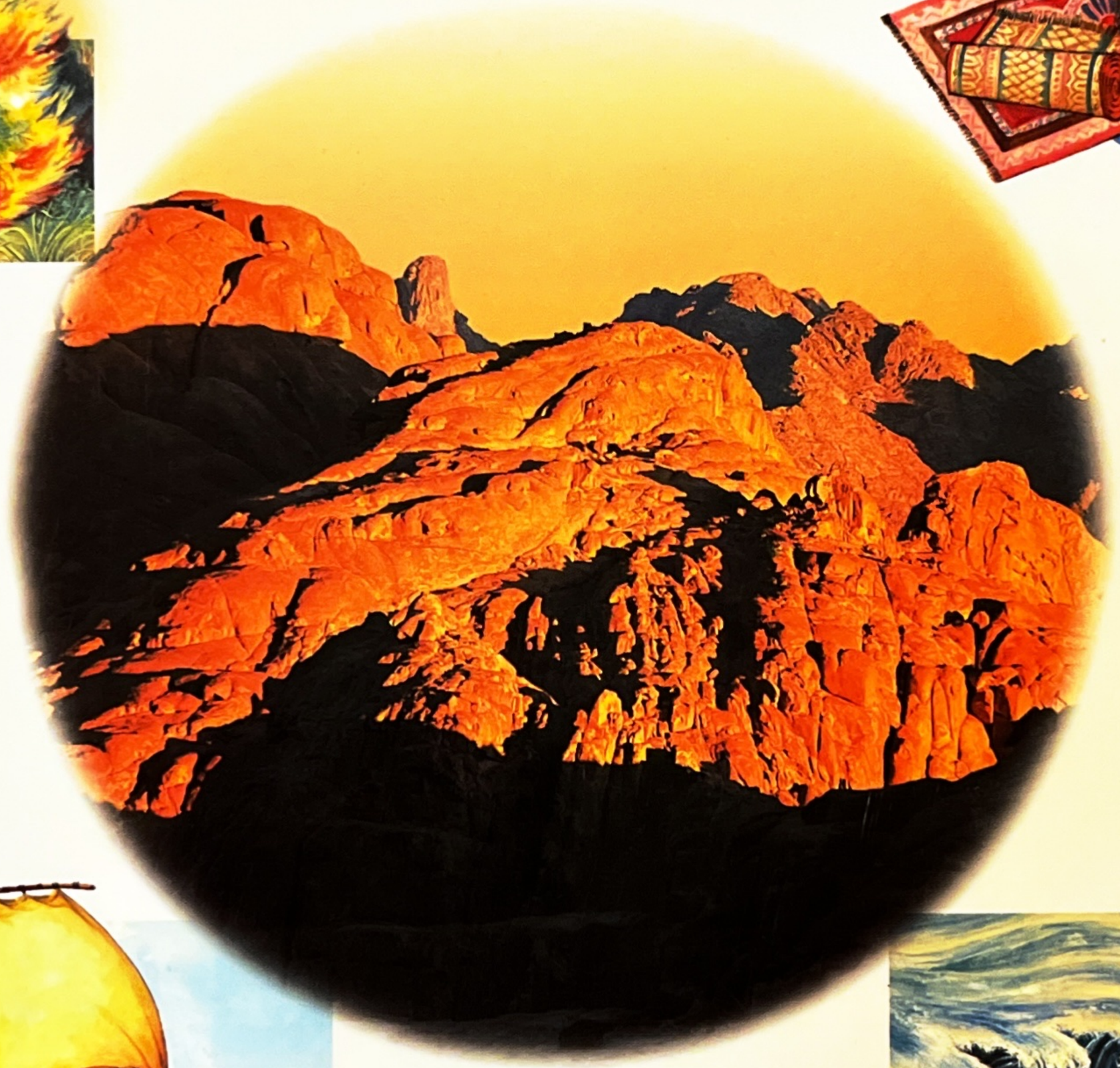
THE PROPHET

MUSA علیہ السلام

What Was the Mission of Musa علیہ السلام, What Were His Miracles,
and What His Life Teaches Me





SANIYASNAIN KHAN

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1. The Children of Israel

Long long ago, more than 3000 years ago, there was a famine in the land of Egypt. The crops would not grow and people were starving. The famine spread to the nearby land of Israel. During this dreadful time, Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام (Joseph), who was working in Egypt as the King of Egypt's minister, invited his father, Prophet Yaqub عليه السلام (Jacob), to come from the land of Israel to Egypt. Yaqub عليه السلام accepted the invitation, and so Yusuf's parents and all his brothers, along with their families, moved to Egypt. As guests of the king's minister, they received a very warm welcome.

After some time things improved, rains came, and the people in Egypt and Israel were able to get food. But Yaqub عليه السلام and his family stayed on in Egypt, making it their home forever. As the years went by, Prophet Yaqub's family grew, and became a large tribe which was later known as the Israelites, or the Children of Israel. (In Arabic, they were

The Prophet Musa's ancestry

From his mother, Musa عليه السلام learned about the history of his own people—how Ibrahim عليه السلام, having destroyed the idols of his city, had been thrown into a fire to die, but, by a miracle had escaped unhurt; and how the Children of Israel were all descended from him. His favorite story was how Yusuf عليه السلام had been tricked by his brothers, brought to Egypt, and sold as a slave there, where he became powerful and famous. It was Yusuf عليه السلام who had brought all of his tribe to live with him in Egypt, and they had been there ever since.

known as Banu Israil.) They were given this name because Yaqub عليه السلام, who was the father and head of this tribe, also had the name of Israel.

For four hundred years the Children of Israel lived peacefully in Egypt. Then Ramses II became the king of Egypt. He was called Firawn or in English, Pharaoh (phonetic: fay-ro), which means *king*. Firawn was very cruel and mean. He made the Children of Israel his slaves. They were forced to do the hard labour of building huge monuments and structures for the Firawn, such as the pyramids. Firawn used his soldiers and police to torture them to get his work done.

From then on, the Children of Israel lived in great fear and suffering.

▲ **The lands of Egypt**
Egypt, still famous as the land of the pyramids, lies in the north east corner of Africa. It can trace its history back more than 3,000 years before the birth of Christ. For a very long time its people were pagans, bowing to idols and practising magic. They worshipped their kings as if they were gods. They knew nothing of the true source of power until Prophet Musa عليه السلام came to tell them. It was not until nearly the end of the seventh century that Egypt became an Islamic country.

2. The Birth of Musa عليه السلام

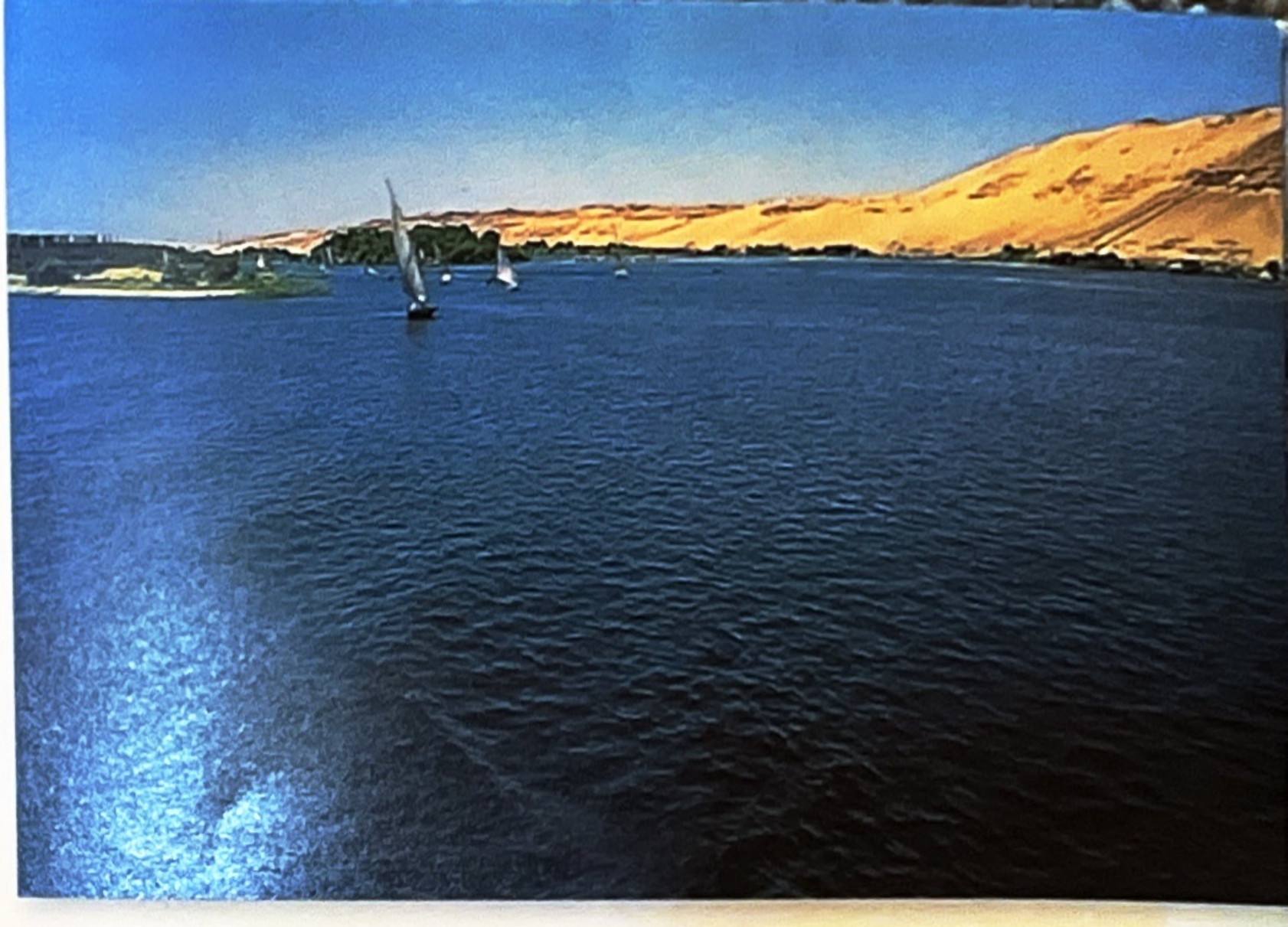
One day a soothsayer in Firawn's court told him that a boy would be born among the Children of Israel who would destroy him and his kingdom. Firawn was enraged, and he issued a barbaric decree. He ordered that all new-born boys of the Children of Israel were to be killed as soon as they were born!

During these dreadful times a pious woman of the Children of Israel, whose name was Yukabid, gave birth to a beautiful boy who later came to be known as Musa عليه السلام or, in English, Moses. His father's name was Imran. The parents of the little Musa عليه السلام were convinced that their young baby would soon be put to death by the cruel soldiers of Firawn, who were always on the lookout for a new-born baby among the families of the Children of Israel.

As Musa's mother worried about this one day, something unusual happened. She was told by Allah that this was a very special child, and that one day he would become a great prophet. Allah inspired Yukabid to put her little baby into a box and cast it into the river Nile. Allah promised her that Musa عليه السلام would be safe and would soon be returned to her.

Yukabid carried out Allah's orders with hope and confidence. Still, her heart

beat rapidly with worry and excitement as she walked down to the river bank and gently put the box containing the baby Musa عليه السلام into the water. The baby's sister, whose name was Qulthum, hid nearby, crouching at the edge of the Nile, to see what would happen to him.



▲ The River Nile

The Nile, the mightiest river in Africa, is 6,700 kilometers in length. It starts in Lake Victoria and flows through Sudan and then Egypt to the Mediterranean. It brings water in plenty to countries with little or no rainfall. There its water has been used since ancient times for farming and all other purposes. Without the Nile waters, there would be no lush green fields and people would go thirsty.

3. A Box in the River

As the soft ripples of water carried the box containing the little Musa ﷺ slowly and gently away, his sister kept a watch on it. To her surprise the waves pushed the box slowly towards the royal palace. A member of Firawn's household noticed the box bobbing by the shore, and brought it to Queen Asiya, the wife of the tyrant Firawn.

The queen was not a cruel person like her husband; she was a kind-hearted and loving woman. When the box was opened and she saw the little soul lying there, she exclaimed: "This is such a lovely child that whoever sees him cannot help but love him."

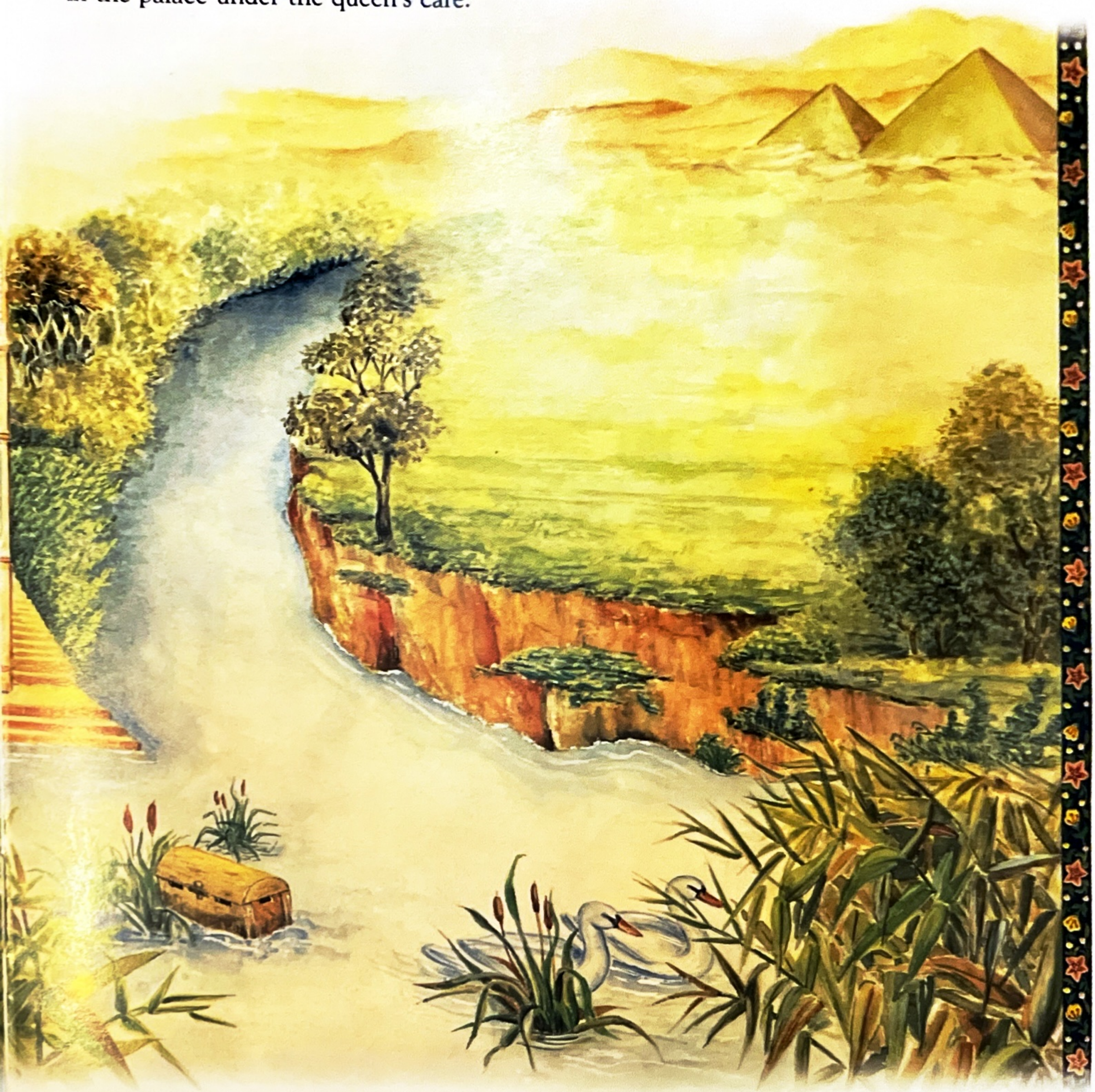
The news of the box containing a new-born baby spread through the palace. When Firawn heard, he guessed that this must be the act of a woman from the Children of Israel, who was trying to save her child from his order to kill every new-born baby boy. Firawn ordered that the child be put to death immediately. But Queen Asiya pleaded with her husband: "This child may bring joy to us both. Do not slay him." The queen wanted to

Pyramids

The pyramids were built thousands of years ago as tombs for the ancient Egyptian kings. About 70 have been discovered, but not more than 35 have been identified. They stand in the desert a few miles east of Cairo. Among the most famous are the three pyramids of Giza. A fourth pyramid was discovered in 1932. The largest of all was made for Cheops (3733-3660 B.C.) and dates back to the fourth dynasty. It measures 755 feet on each side, is 451 feet high and covers 13 acres. It took 100,000 men 20 years to build it, using 6,000,000 tons of stone. The mechanical aids they used are still a mystery to us today.

keep this baby boy. "He may show promise, and we may adopt him as our son," Queen Asiya said. Firawn trembled with rage that anyone would dare to disagree with him. But finally the queen's strong arguments touched his heart. In the end, Firawn relented and agreed that the child should be brought up in the palace under the queen's care.

Queen Asiya was thrilled. But, to her surprise, the baby would not stop crying. She called a wet-nurse, but the baby would not feed and continued wailing. Several nurses were called, but none could feed him. As it says in the Quran: "Allah caused him to refuse his nurses' breasts."



4. The Miraculous Reunion

There was chaos in the palace, but Musa's sister, who had followed the box containing the child to the palace, managed to send word to the Queen about a "particular nurse" who could bring him up and take good care of him. Queen Asiya was pleased to hear that. She immediately sent for this nurse.

When Yukabid came to the palace, the queen did not know that she was the real mother of Musa عليه السلام. Queen Asiya explained the situation and handed the baby into her care. As soon as Musa's mother took her little baby in her arms, he stopped crying and fed happily. The queen was delighted to see this and sighed with relief: the baby's life was now out of danger.

And thus, as the Quran tells us, Allah restored Musa عليه السلام to his mother, so that her eyes might be cooled from weeping and she

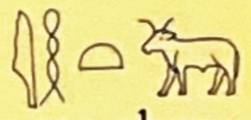
River Nile

should grieve no more and would know that Allah's promise was fulfilled (20:40). Musa's mother was overjoyed, and thanked Allah from the depths of her heart. She thought how strange it was that her child would now be brought up in the palace of Firawn, the very same person who had ordered that all the new-born baby boys of the Children of Israel be put to death!

Hieroglyphics

The ancient Egyptians developed a writing system called hieroglyphics using consonants and picture symbols instead of an alphabet as we know it.

Hieroglyphs were called "the words of the gods." They were only used for official texts. At that time—3000 B.C.—only a handful of Egyptians could read and write. They were the *scribes*. The scribes had a very high place in Firawn's palace and in society. They were the only ones who could record things, and Firawn depended on them to run his administration—civil, military and religious. The Egyptians used stone tablets, and they also discovered a way to make paper with the papyrus plant.

In hieroglyphics, the consonant symbols were combined with pictures, or *ideograms*, to give the whole meaning of the word. Since the ancient Egyptians did not write any vowels, many different words would have looked the same without the picture symbol. Thus the word "cow" was written  where the first three signs are phonograms that would be read jHt and the fourth sign, the ideogram, determines the sounds written with the three first signs to mean "cow."

Some words were so commonplace they were often written with ideograms only. "People" was written thus,

The understanding of hieroglyphics was lost for many hundreds of years after the decline of the ancient Egyptian civilization. In 1799 French soldiers on a campaign in Egypt with Napoleon found a black stone with an inscription in both hieroglyphics and Greek, called the Rosetta Stone, which gave the first clue to solving this mystery.

5. Musa عليه السلام Grows Up

The palace was a place of endless delights and discoveries for Musa عليه السلام. A favourite of the guards and attendants, the little prince roamed far and wide, playing and dreaming in the lovely gardens, running down the long corridors, in and out of the kitchens and workshops, visiting the carpenters, the masons, the potters and jewelers.

Queen Asiya spent time with Musa عليه السلام every day, telling stories and teaching him the language of Egypt. From his other mother, Yukabid, Musa عليه السلام learned the wisdom of his forefathers. He learned about the great prophets Ibrahim, Yaqub, Yusuf (upon all of whom be peace), and the Children of Israel, and their steadfast belief in Allah.

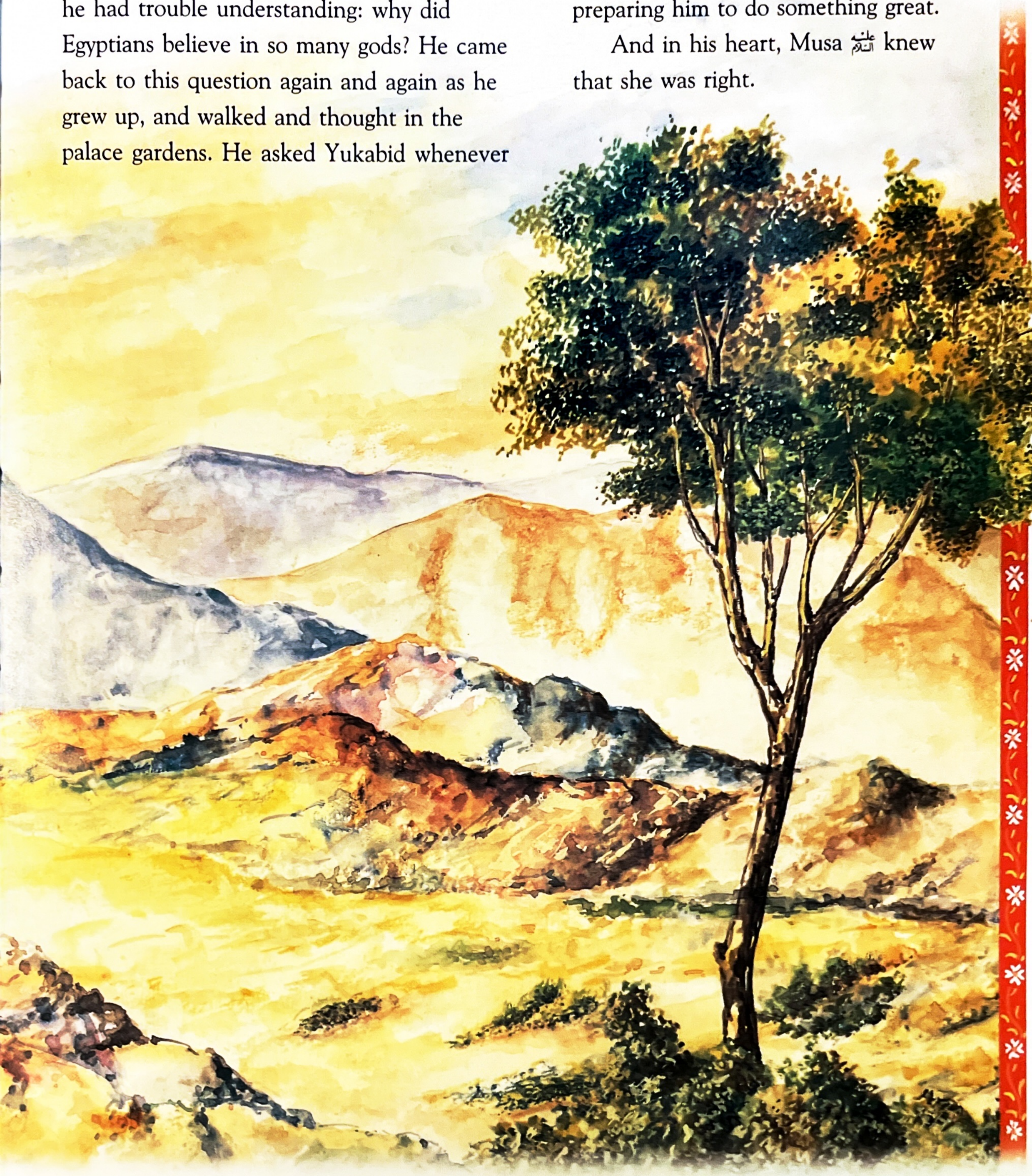
Firawn's cruelty

An ancient Egyptian wall picture shows how badly Firawn treated his subjects. Here he is holding some prisoners by their hair.

By the time Musa عليه السلام was born, in the thirteenth century B.C., the Tribe of Israel had become a slave class in Egypt. Firawn and his priests and magicians ruled. They said the Israelites were worthless people, fit only to do the hardest work in the land making mud bricks, hoeing the earth, carrying heavy loads and cleaning up after the 'superior' Egyptians.

Though from a young age Musa عليه السلام had some difficulty speaking fluently, he was an excellent student. There was only one thing he had trouble understanding: why did Egyptians believe in so many gods? He came back to this question again and again as he grew up, and walked and thought in the palace gardens. He asked Yukabid whenever he met her. Musa's mother always reminded him that it was the One God who had saved his life and was now preparing him to do something great.

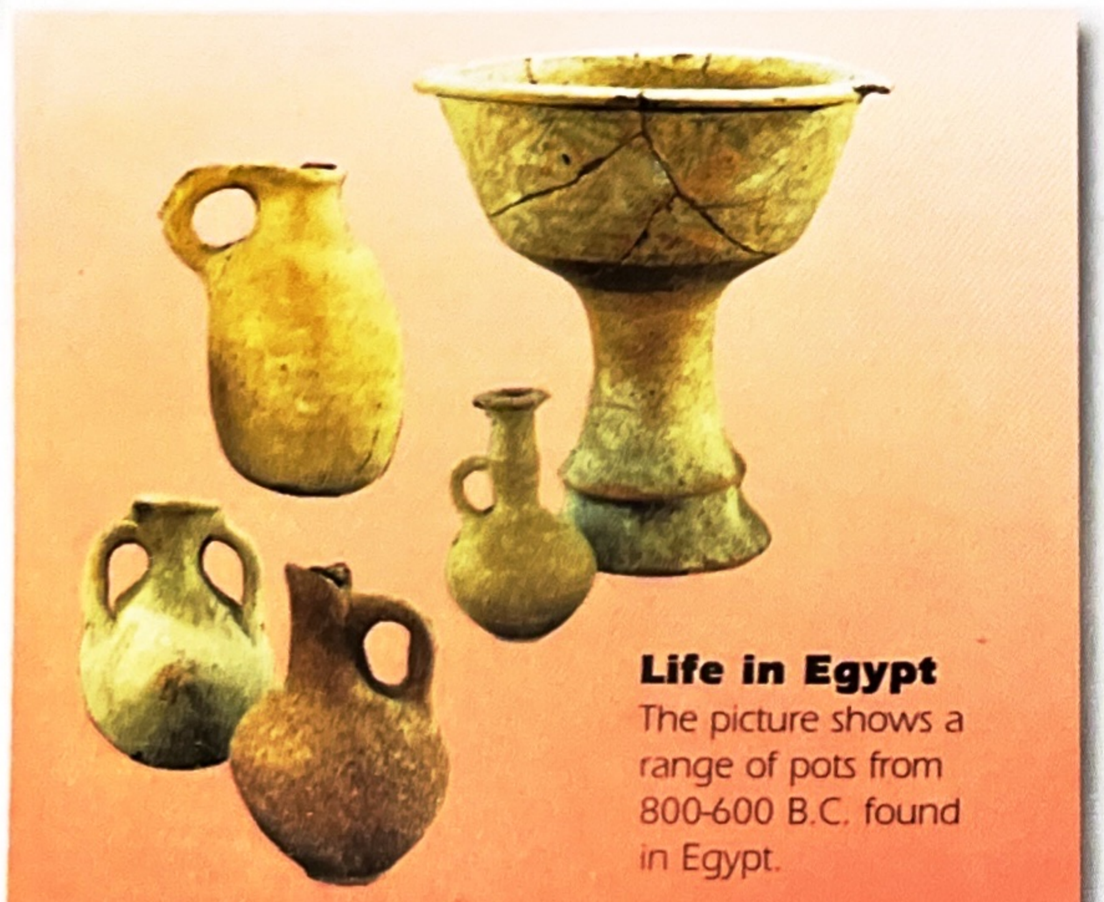
And in his heart, Musa عليه السلام knew that she was right.



6. A Fateful Accident

One day Musa ﷺ was going along a street in the city in the noontime heat when he saw two people fighting. One of them was from the Children of Israel and the other was one of Firawn's men – a *qibti* or Copt. The Israelite called out for help. To prevent them from fighting, Musa ﷺ pushed one of the men hard, too hard; the man fell to the ground and died on the spot. The frightened Israelite ran away. No one else was around, and Musa ﷺ hurried back to the palace.

The man who was killed was a follower of Firawn. Musa ﷺ had not meant to kill him. It was just an accident. Musa ﷺ was filled with sorrow, and asked the Lord for forgiveness. "This is the work of Satan," said Musa ﷺ. "He is the sworn enemy of man and seeks to lead me astray." Musa ﷺ knew that his anger had got the best of him. He prayed, "Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned against my soul." (28:16).



Life in Egypt
The picture shows a range of pots from 800-600 B.C. found in Egypt.

The next morning Musa ﷺ went into the town in fear and caution. He was surprised to see the same man whom he had saved the day before fighting again; and again the Israelite cried out to Musa ﷺ for help. Musa ﷺ saw that he was a quarrelsome person. This made Musa ﷺ angry, and he walked up to the man and told him how bad his behaviour was. The

Israelite began shouting: "Musa, are you going to kill me as you killed that man yesterday? You are surely seeking to be a tyrant in this land, not an upright man!"

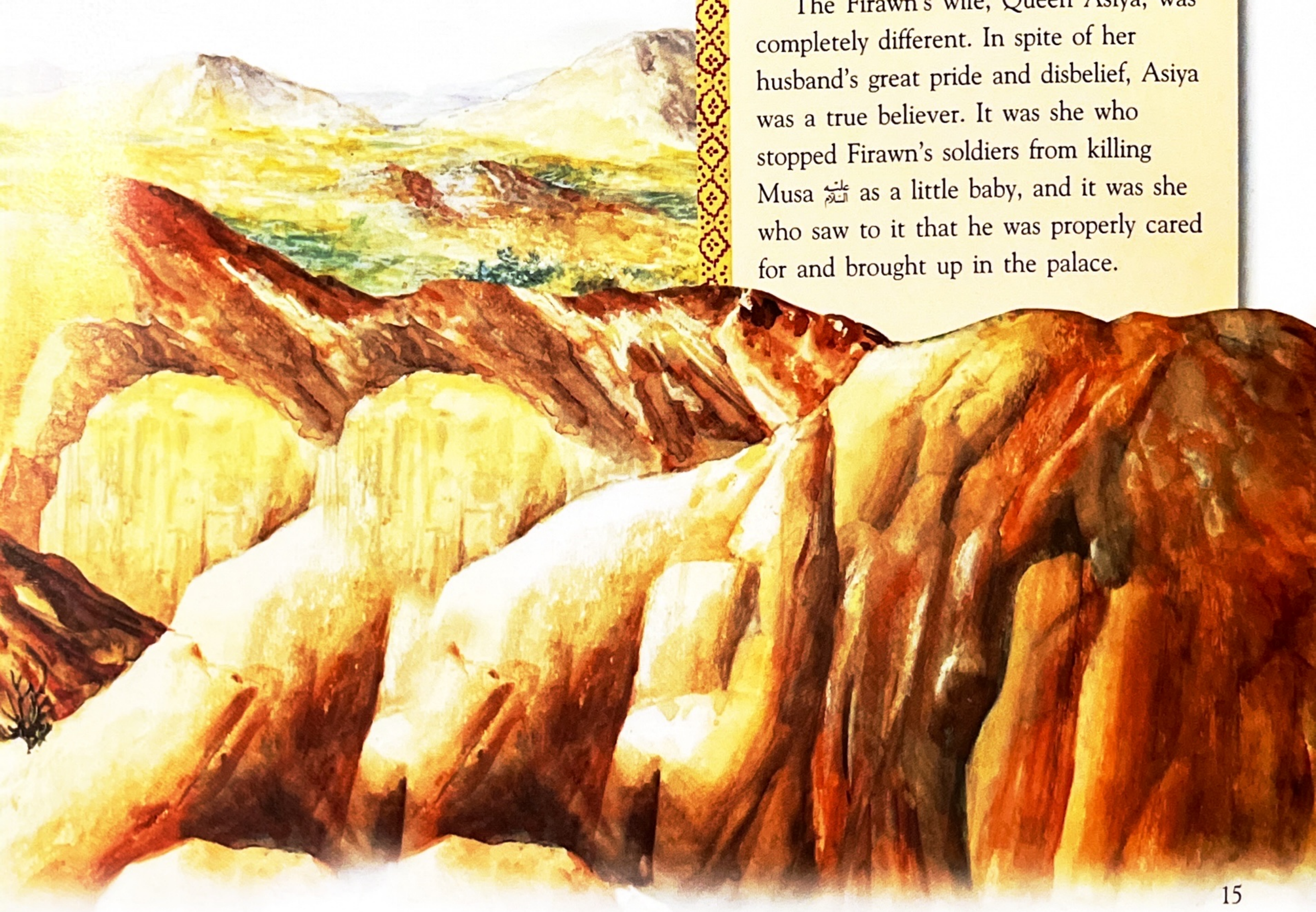
Now Firawn would surely come to know of yesterday's incident! Musa عليه السلام feared Firawn would think he had deliberately killed one of his followers. Just then a person came running, and cried out: "Listen! O Musa! Firawn has heard the news of the death of his follower and the officials are in his court right now plotting against you. They are going to kill you!" Gasping, the man added: "I am one of those who wish you well. Therefore, flee for your life!"

Musa عليه السلام understood: what he feared was actually happening. He knew Firawn would seek revenge. He knew that he had to run away from Egypt. He prayed: "My Lord! Deliver me from these evil men."

Firawn and Queen Asiya

The King of Egypt, Firawn Ramses II, was a cruel ruler. From his palaces, he gave orders that made the people of Egypt suffer. The Children of Israel were treated worst of all. The King enjoyed his power. He was the ruler of the land, but he also told the people that *he* was their god, and they should obey and worship him. Everyone was afraid of him.

The Firawn's wife, Queen Asiya, was completely different. In spite of her husband's great pride and disbelief, Asiya was a true believer. It was she who stopped Firawn's soldiers from killing Musa عليه السلام as a little baby, and it was she who saw to it that he was properly cared for and brought up in the palace.



7. A Stranger and the Old Man

Musa ﷺ travelled day and night on foot through the vast desert. As he moved farther and farther away from his beloved land of Egypt, Musa ﷺ prayed, "May my Lord guide me to the right path.... I surely stand in great need of whatever good You shall send down upon me."

After several days he reached Madyan. Resting in the shade of a rock near the Gulf of Aqaba, Musa ﷺ saw some men drawing water from a well for their animals, while two young women stood nearby, holding back their thirsty flock. He rose to give them a helping hand, taking their sheep to the well for them. The two girls thanked him and went on their way.

Shortly, one of them returned and said shyly, "My father is asking you to come. He wishes to reward you for watering our flock." Now it so happened that the girls' father was a pious man and a prophet by the name of Shu'yab ﷺ. Shu'yab ﷺ thanked Musa ﷺ for

Escape to Madyan

Madyan was the home of a wandering Arab tribe, who were neighbours of the Canaanites. They lived in the dry barren lands on the western edge of the Arabian desert, around the Gulf of Aqabah. Their main lands in the times of the Prophet Musa ﷺ were in the north east of the Sinai Peninsula to the east of the Amalekites. They lived in tents, kept sheep and travelled on camels.

helping his daughters, and listened attentively to Musa's story of his flight from Egypt.

Shu'yab ﷺ liked the strong and trustworthy stranger, and as he was old and alone in the village he needed help. "I am willing to let you marry one of my daughters, on the condition that you serve me for eight years," Shu'yab ﷺ told Musa ﷺ. "God willing you will find me an upright man," he added. (28:27)

Taken by surprise, but pleased, Musa ﷺ agreed. Surely this help had come from Allah as a blessing, he thought.

▲ **The Travels of Musa ﷺ**
Musa ﷺ travelled across the harsh and waterless Sinai Desert before reaching Madyan, where he lived with the family of Shu'ayb ﷺ.

Shu'yab ﷺ welcomes Musa ﷺ

Shu'yab ﷺ said to Musa ﷺ: "The real truth is that Allah has guided you to me. I am a descendant of your beloved Yusuf ﷺ and father Yaqub ﷺ and his grandfather, Ibrahim ﷺ. Allah has brought you out of Egypt, not just to become a shepherd, but to complete your instruction with me, for I too am a prophet." Shu'yab ﷺ told Musa ﷺ he was safe there, and bade him welcome.

8. Some Years in Madyan

Thus Musa ﷺ turned a new page in his life. He married Prophet Shu'yab's daughter, Safura, and settled down in the beautiful valley of Madyan, overlooking great mountain ranges and vast deserts. Everything had turned out so much better than he ever imagined. Musa ﷺ realized that if a believer puts his entire trust in Allah, He surely helps him from unknown sources.

Musa ﷺ began to like this land of rocks and sand, where shepherds roamed with their flocks. He took Prophet Shu'yab's flocks to graze and to water. He walked for hours in the peaceful green valley of Madyan and pondered the marvels of nature.

An urge to know the truth always burned in him. He talked with his father-in-law for hours, asking question after question about nature, human life and God's purpose. Shu'yab ﷺ did not fail to enrich Musa ﷺ with his wisdom.

Eight years passed, and Musa ﷺ was free to leave. He had come to love

▲ **A child shepherd in the desert**
While in Madyan, Musa ﷺ tended sheep and goats around the hills under the bright burning sun. Shepherding was a familiar kind of training for those who were one day to be prophets.

Madyan, but never forgot his country or his people, persecuted by Firawn. He longed to help them. With Prophet Shu'yab's blessings Musa عليه السلام and his family left Madyan, and headed back toward Egypt. ▶

Jebel Musa

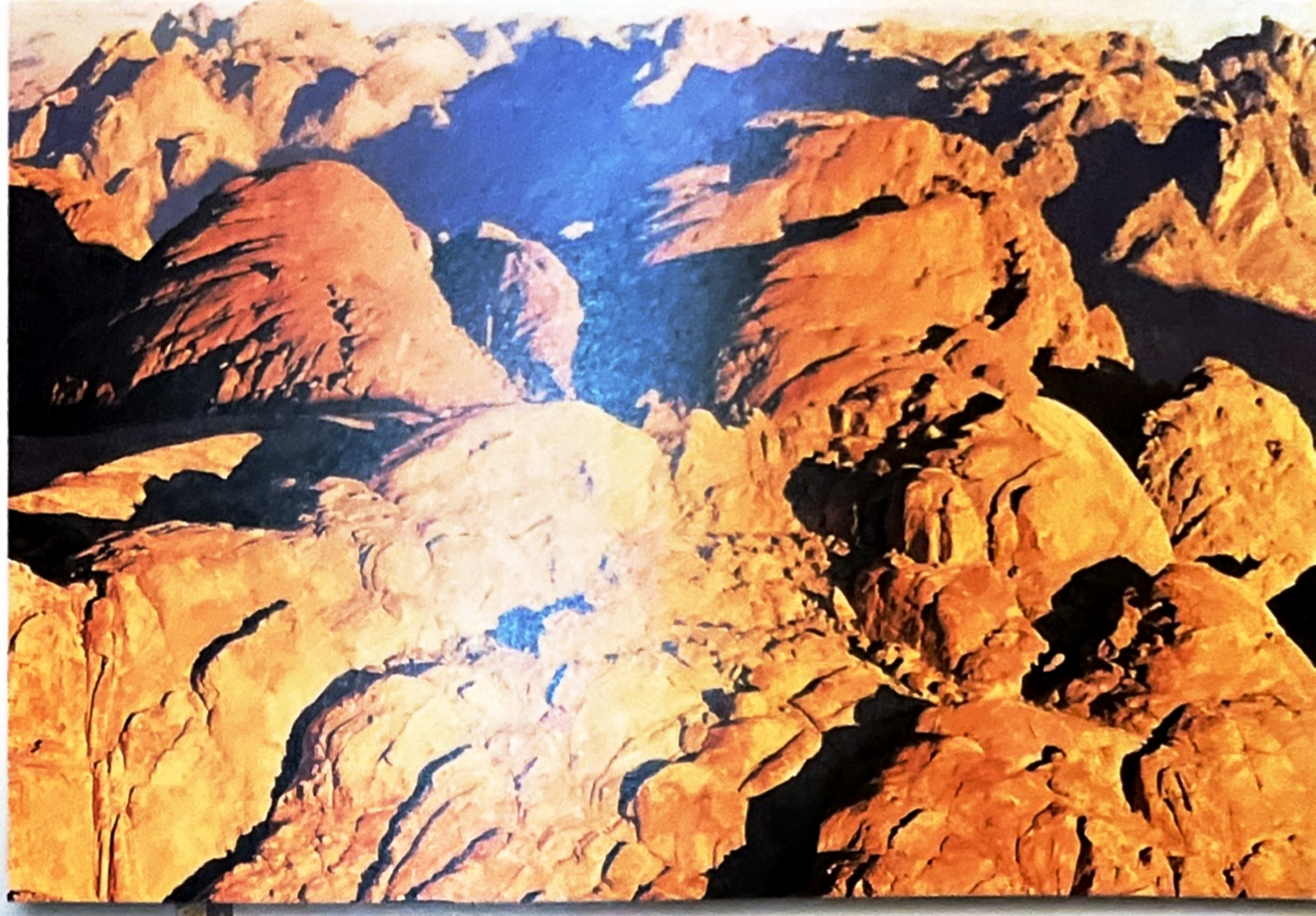
Part of a group of peaks in the south of the Sinai Peninsula that is known as Jebel Musa, or the "Mountain of Musa," in memory of what happened there during Prophet Musa's return journey to Egypt and later, when he finally led the Israelites out of Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula.

9. The Burning Bush

Travelling slowly toward Mount Sinai, they passed through an awesome landscape of desert and rock. One cold winter's evening, as it grew darker and a breeze began to blow, they seemed to have lost their way. They decided to camp for the night. Musa عليه السلام looked around and, at a distance, noticed a fire on the side of a mountain. "Wait here!" he said to his family. "Look, I can see a fire. Perhaps I can bring you some news, or at least I can get a burning branch from the fire, so that we may warm ourselves!"

After stumbling and groping in the darkness, Musa عليه السلام came to the place where he had seen the source of light, a tree which seemed to be burning. As soon as Musa عليه السلام approached it a voice on his right side called out from above the tree: "Blessed be He who is in this fire and all around it! Glory to Allah, Lord of the universe! Musa, I am

Allah, the Mighty, the Wise One. Take off your sandals, for you are now in the sacred valley of Tuwa. Know that I have chosen you. Therefore, listen to what shall be revealed. I am Allah, there is no deity save Me. So serve Me and establish the rites of worship for My remembrance. The hour is surely coming. But I will keep it hidden, so that every soul may be rewarded for its labours." (20:11-16)



▲ **Mount Sinai**
On his return from Madyan to Egypt, Musa ﷺ spotted a burning bush in a valley on Mount Sinai. When he came near it, Allah spoke to him, gave him His special signs, and told him to take Allah's message to Firawn.

Musa عليه السلام stood stock still and speechless. He began trembling. He managed to overcome his fear, took off his sandals and prostrated himself. Allah said: "What is that in your right hand, O Musa?" He mustered the courage to reply: "It is my staff, I lean on it, and I beat down leaves for my sheep with it, and I use it for other things too." Allah commanded: "Throw it down, O Musa!"

Musa عليه السلام threw down the stick. It turned into a large snake, coiling and uncoiling swiftly in front of him. He shrank back in fear and turned to run. But Allah spoke again: "Grasp it and have no fear. We shall return it to its former state. Do not be alarmed. My Messengers are never afraid in My presence. As for those who sin and then do good instead of evil, I am forgiving and merciful to them."

10. Allah Talks to Musa عليه السلام

Though terrified, Musa عليه السلام obediently walked up to the snake and tried to hold it. As he touched the snake, it turned into the same old staff he had thrown down minutes before. Allah ordered him to put his hand under his armpit and then remove it. Musa عليه السلام did so, and saw that his hand was shining brightly with a strange light.

Allah told Musa عليه السلام that these were the two signs, and commanded Musa عليه السلام to go to Fir'awn with these signs and give him His message.

Musa عليه السلام was hesitant to go to Egypt. "Oh, my Lord, I have killed one of them, so I fear they will kill me!" he pleaded. He was afraid he would be rejected; he was afraid he would get tongue-tied and begin stammering. He was full of fears, and begged Allah for help:

"Lord, put courage into my heart,
Ease my task for me
And loosen the knot of my tongue
So that they may understand my words.
Appoint for me a counsellor from
among my kinsmen,
Harun, my brother.
Grant me strength through him, and
let him share my task.
So that we may give glory to You,
And remember You always."

(*Surah Ta Ha* 20:25-34)

Harun عليه السلام was Prophet Musa's elder brother, whom he loved and respected. Harun عليه السلام was noted for his beautifully refined way of speaking. He had escaped Firawn's order that changed Prophet Musa's life, but still had to be very careful of the Egyptians. Harun عليه السلام had never

come to the palace, but whenever Musa عليه السلام visited his mother they would talk for hours about all the goings on in Egypt. Now, facing this great challenge, Musa عليه السلام prayed to Allah to let Harun عليه السلام accompany him.

"Your request is granted, O Musa," Allah said, and promised that he would now be safe.

The Ten Commandments

The tablets given to the Prophet Musa عليه السلام on Mount Sinai are called the Ten Commandments. The Quran explained that "to Musa We gave the scripture, a perfect code for the righteous, with precepts about all things, a guide and a mercy, so that they might believe in meeting their Lord." (6:154).

These commandments were directions and divine guidance for people in all ages to lead their lives in accordance with the purpose and will of Allah.

The following commandments are mentioned in the Quran:.

1. You should not set up anything as a partner with Allah.
2. You should treat your parents kindly.
3. You should not kill your children for fear of poverty, for We provide sustenance for you and for them.
4. You should not go near indecent things, whether they be open or hidden.
5. You should not take life, which Allah has made sacred, except as a matter of justice and in obedience to the law.
6. You should not go near the property of an orphan except to improve it, until he or she reaches maturity.
7. You should use a full measure and a just balance.
8. Whatever you say should be just, even though it concerns your own relatives.
9. You should fulfil your Covenant with Allah.
10. Allah also enjoins: "This way alone is My Right Way; therefore you should follow it and should not follow other paths, lest they lead you astray from His Way."

—Surah 6, Al-An'am:151-153

11. Musa عليه السلام Brings Allah's Message to Egypt

With a sense of divine mission and armed with the clear signs of Allah, Musa عليه السلام set out for Egypt. When he arrived, he narrated his story to several people, but only a few believed him; they feared the persecution of Firawn and his nobles.

"If you believe in Allah, my people, and have surrendered yourselves to Him, in Him alone then put your trust," Musa عليه السلام said to them. Some responded: "In Allah we have put our trust. Lord, do not let us suffer at the hands of wicked men. Deliver us, through Your mercy, from the unbelievers." (10:82-86)

Musa عليه السلام lost no time and, with his brother Harun عليه السلام, went straight to Firawn's court. During Musa's long stay in Madyan, Firawn, Ramses II died and his son, Firawn, Merenptah, had taken over. Merenptah recognized Musa عليه السلام; they had grown up together in the palace. But he and his chiefs rejected Allah's message outright: "What!" they said. "Are we to believe in two men like

yourselves, whose people are our bondsmen?" (23:47)

Musa عليه السلام did not give up. "I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Universe, and may tell nothing of Allah but what is true," he said. "I bring you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel depart with me."

At this, Firawn became furious and erupted, "And who is your Lord, Musa?"

"Our Lord," replied Musa عليه السلام, "is He that

gave all creatures their special forms, then rightly guided them."

"But what about the past generations?" asked Firawn.

"The knowledge of them is with my Lord, in a Book," Musa عليه السلام replied. "He does not err, neither does He forget. It is He who has made the earth your cradle and traced on it paths for you to walk on. It is He who sends down water from the sky with which we bring forth every kind of plant, saying, 'Eat and graze your cattle. Surely in this there are signs for men of understanding. From the earth We have created you, and to the earth We will restore you; and from it We shall bring you back to life.'"

The battle is joined

The Prophet Musa and Harun's meeting with Firawn that day was the beginning of a long and bitter struggle.

Following Allah's direction, they implored Firawn to acknowledge Allah's truth, abandon his cruel and unjust practices and release the Children of Israel from bondage. Firawn responded with a hostility that became more vicious and vengeful every time he came up against the power of Allah's message and the spiritual strength and solidity of His followers.

At first Firawn tried to defeat Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام by challenging Allah's signs with his magicians. That failed miserably, but still Firawn rejected Allah's word and plotted anew to silence Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام and anyone else who believed in a god other than himself, Firawn.

Allah warned, through His messengers, that such falsehoods against Him would destroy their perpetrators. And His warnings came true, in the form of a series of plagues.

12. Firawn: "Show Us Your Signs!"

Firawn looked down from his throne at the two men from the Children of Israel, whom he considered his slaves. He spoke rudely, reminding Musa عليه السلام that he had killed an Egyptian: "Did we not bring you up when you were an infant? And did you not stay several years of your life among us? Yet you have done what you have done; surely you are ungrateful."

Prophet Musa عليه السلام replied, "Indeed I did that then, being one of those that stray; so I fled from you. But my Lord gave me Judgement and made me one of the Prophets. And this is the favour with which you reproach me. But you have made the Children of Israel your slaves."

Again Firawn repeated his first question: "Who is the Lord of the universe?" And Musa عليه السلام replied, "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. If only you had faith!" (26:23)

"Do you hear this?!" bellowed Firawn to his courtiers. No one had ever dared to say such words in front of him.

But Musa عليه السلام continued, "He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers." Firawn interrupted with a sneer: "Surely your Messenger who was sent to you is possessed!"

Musa عليه السلام persisted calmly: "He is the Lord of the East and West, and what is between them, if you have understanding."

Firawn flew into a rage, shouting: "If you believe in a god other than me, I will surely imprison you!"

"Even if I showed you clear and convincing signs?" asked Musa عليه السلام.

"Show us your signs, if what you say be true!" thundered Firawn.

Musa ﷺ threw down his staff, and it changed into a huge snake. Then he drew his hand from his armpit, and it was shining brightly like a light to all who saw.

Firawn scoffed at these signs, but his courtiers goaded him: "This man is trying to drive you out of your land with his magic." Firawn decided the two should be taught a lesson, so he plotted with his court to stage a contest between Musa ﷺ and Harun ﷺ and the best magicians of the land.

In anticipation of celebrating the brothers' crushing defeat, the contest was fixed for the next Festival Day.

13. Musa عليه السلام versus the Magicians

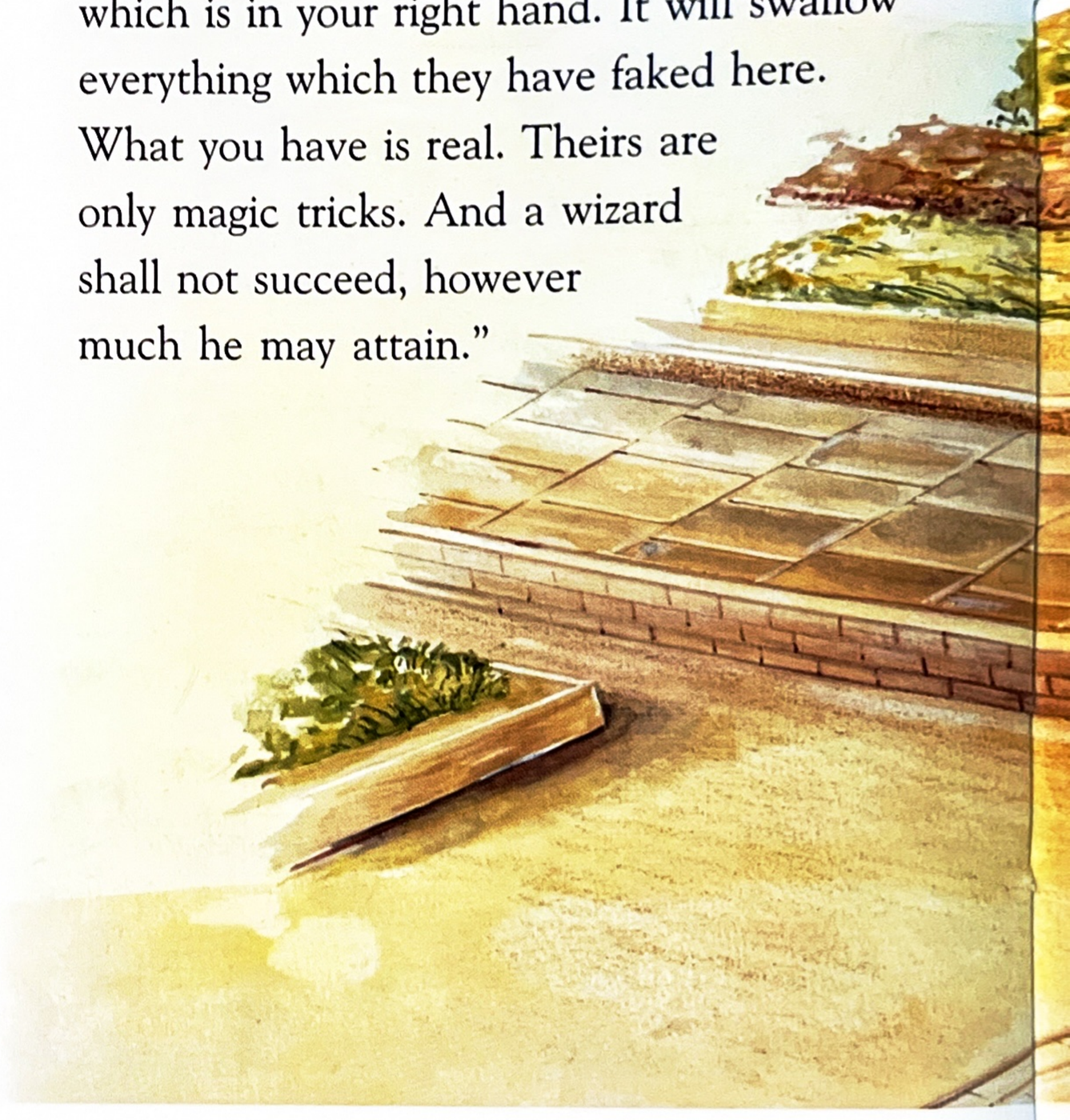
The huge square where the contest was to be held gradually filled with thousands of curious spectators. They had never before heard of such a contest, and the presence of Firawn made this the single most important event of the times. Everyone was very excited.

The most famous magicians of Egypt whispered to each other as they approached Firawn and bowed down before him. Firawn nodded, assuring them all of victory favours. But Musa عليه السلام warned them: "Woe to you! Invent no falsehoods against Allah, or He will destroy you with a scourge. Impostors will surely come to grief." (20:61)

"Will you throw first, or shall we?" the magicians asked Musa عليه السلام. "Throw," he replied calmly.

The magicians threw down their magic ropes and sticks, with the cry: "By Firawn's glory, we shall win!" They bewitched the people and terrified them with a display of great magic. They cleverly made it seem to the entire gathering that the ropes and sticks had turned into live serpents wriggling and writhing on the ground! Everyone was struck dumb with horror.

As the snakes seemed to coil and uncoil around him, Musa عليه السلام began to lose his nerve. But just then the Lord spoke to him: "Have no fear, you shall surely win. Throw that which is in your right hand. It will swallow everything which they have faked here. What you have is real. Theirs are only magic tricks. And a wizard shall not succeed, however much he may attain."



Defeat fuels fury

Firawn and his men had been defeated and put to shame before hundreds of thousands of ordinary people. Even the magicians bowed down before the truth of the Lord. Still, Firawn and his men insisted all the more violently: "This is nothing but baseless magic; nor have we heard of the like among our forefathers."

Musa عليه السلام replied, "My Lord knows best the man who brings guidance from His presence and gains the reward of the hereafter. The wrongdoers shall never prosper." (28:37)

It was a message that Allah's followers would take to heart in the difficult days ahead, as Firawn dramatically escalated his vengeful persecution of the Children of Israel.

Prophet Musa's confidence restored, he did as Allah said. The moment his staff touched the ground, it became a huge snake, much bigger than those of the magicians, and began to eat them up one after another.

Everyone was wonderstruck. The magicians were speechless, and so was Firawn. The magicians knew all about the art of magic, so they realised at once that this was not magic. It was a real snake. Only Allah's help could have produced it.

As the people whispered excitedly among themselves, Musa عليه السلام bent over and picked up the snake, which instantaneously became his old staff again.

14. The Magicians Bow Down to Allah's Truth

The most skilled magicians of the land bowed their heads in humility before Allah's signs. They were convinced that what Musa عليه السلام had performed on the Festival Day was a miracle, a feat beyond human powers: "We believe in the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of Musa and Harun," they said.

Firawn exploded with rage against the magicians. "How dare you believe in Him without my leave?! This man must be your master, one who has taught you witchcraft. This is a plot you have contrived to turn the people out of the city. But you will see." He threatened to cut off their hands and legs on opposite sides, and crucify them on the trunks of palm trees.

"That cannot harm us," they replied, bravely acknowledging the message of Musa عليه السلام, even in the face of the tyrannical Firawn's threats. They had seen the truth. "We shall surely return to our Lord. You would punish us only because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they were shown to us. Lord, give us patience and let us die in submission."

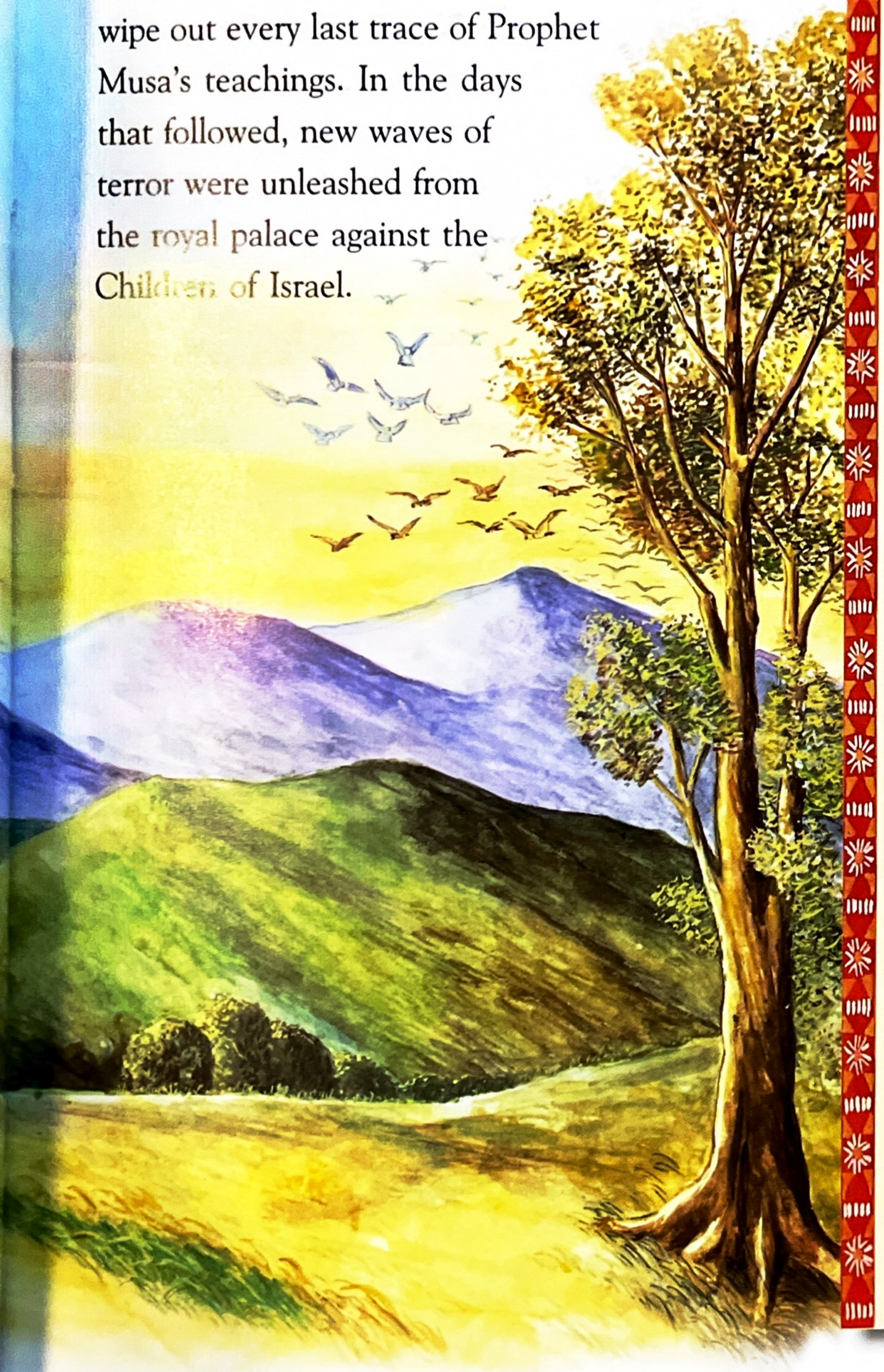
The magicians spoke out boldly to Firawn: "We will not prefer you over the clear signs that have come to us; nor over Him who has created us. Therefore, do your worst; you can punish us only in the present life."

They continued forthrightly: "We have put our faith in our Lord, so that He may forgive us our sins, and the magic you have forced us to practice. Better is the reward of Allah, and more lasting.... We trust that He will forgive us our sins, since we are the first who have believed."

It was unthinkable! These masters of magic, this elite group who should be the last to submit to the "signs" of a mere slave, were

fearlessly professing their faith in the God of Musa عليه السلام ! Firawn could not imagine such insolence from his subjects. The chiefs of the royal court challenged him: "Will you allow Musa and his people to make mischief in the land, and to reject you and your gods?" They were right: the threat to Firawn's power had grown too menacing; it could no longer be tolerated.

Firawn vowed then and there to wipe out every last trace of Prophet Musa's teachings. In the days that followed, new waves of terror were unleashed from the royal palace against the Children of Israel.



New challenges

Prophet Musa عليه السلام struggled to calm his people and reassure them in the face of each new round of brutality from Firawn. "Seek help in Allah and be patient. The earth belongs to Allah. He gives it for an inheritance to whom He will. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous," he told them. But Prophet Musa's followers were tired and frightened. Would the cycles of vengeance never end? "We were oppressed before you came to us, and oppressed we still remain," they told Musa عليه السلام.

Musa عليه السلام tried to explain that one day they would be free of Firawn's tyranny, and would then have to build their own just society, and that their ability to conduct themselves responsibly was being tested now. Allah had told Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام the way: "Build houses in Egypt for your people and make your homes places of worship. Conduct prayers and give good tidings to the faithful."

By himself, Musa عليه السلام prayed fervently, begging the Lord to punish the cruel Firawn and his men: "You have bestowed on Firawn and his nobles splendour and riches in this life, so that they may stray from Your path. Lord, destroy their riches and harden their hearts, so that they shall persist in unbelief until they face a terrible punishment."

Allah promised that Prophet Musa's prayers would be answered. And in the days ahead they were, but everyone had to pay the price. For in turning his back on the call of the prophets Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام, Firawn brought widespread calamity and death upon himself and his people.

15. Qarun's Treasure

Beside ever more harsh persecution of the Israelites, a propaganda war was unleashed against Musa عليه السلام. One of Firawn's chiefs in particular excelled in the game of slander-mongering.

Qarun or Korah was one of the Children of Israel who had left his people and become a close associate of Firawn. He was so rich that the keys of his treasure were too heavy for even several strong men to carry. He lived in a huge mansion, and enjoyed every luxury available.

When he publicly displayed the glitter of his immense wealth, those who covetted the worldly life said, "How wonderful it would be if we possessed the like of what Qarun has been given. Surely he is a man of great good fortune." But those who had been given true knowledge said, "Alas for you! The reward of Allah in the Hereafter is better for him who believes and does good works, and none shall receive it except those who have endured with fortitude."

Musa عليه السلام and other Israelite leaders admonished Qarun to pay the *zakat* from the wealth Allah had given him for charity and good works. But Qarun reacted arrogantly, arguing that the wealth which he possessed was due to his own cleverness. To Prophet Musa's personal entreaty he avowed that his wealth was a sign of Allah's favour.

Qarun not only refused to give the *zakat*, but he started a campaign of lies against Musa عليه السلام. Then he bribed people to spread the wicked rumours.

An appeal to selfishness

Firawn himself actively led the slander campaigns. He asserted that Prophet Musa's teachings were lies, and ridiculed him for his simple woolen dress and lack of ornaments. At the same time, he appealed to the most base and selfish instincts of his people in an effort to blind them to the light of Prophet Musa's message: "O my people, is the kingdom of Egypt not mine, and are these rivers which flow at my feet not mine too? Can you not see? Am I not better than this man, who is unworthy of respect, who cannot even express himself properly? Why is he not loaded with gold or attended upon by angels?"

It was truly an evil deed. But, as Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has told us, one fine day Allah made the earth open up and engulf Qarun and his palace, as if he had never existed at all! Those who envied Qarun were reminded to be thankful to Allah in both poverty and abundance.

But for Firawn and his men, the lesson of Qarun only brought the conflict with Musa عليه السلام and his message of the one true God to a new, more ominous point of crisis.

16. A Believer Speaks Out

Firawn may have unleashed a reign of terror on the Children of Israel and plotted to destroy Musa عليه السلام, but there were still courtiers and others, even within Firawn's household, who believed in the message of Allah—including Queen Asiya.

Fearing her husband's wrath, the queen kept her faith hidden. But it was she, after all, who had picked up the infant Musa عليه السلام from the box on the bank of the river Nile and pleaded with her husband not to kill him. As Firawn increased his atrocities against the Children of Israel, she began to hate him. She felt suffocated in the palace, and prayed: "Lord, build me a house in Your presence in Paradise, and deliver me from Firawn and his misdeeds."

There was another secret believer who

was a close kinsman of Firawn and a member of his inner council. When Firawn's plan to have Musa عليه السلام murdered was put to a vote, this honest man spoke out: "Would you slay a man merely because he says: 'My Lord is Allah'? He has brought you clear signs from your Lord. If he is lying, may his lie be on his head; but if he is speaking the truth, a part at least of what he threatens will strike you down. Allah does not guide the lying sinner. Today we, my people, are the masters, and have great fame throughout the world. But who will save us from the might of Allah when it bears down upon us?"

Firawn: 'No god but me'

Musa عليه السلام had hoped Firawn might give up his evil ways when he saw what happened to Qarun. But greed for wealth and lust for power blinded Firawn and his people to the truth. Firawn's kingdom was built on the belief that he, Firawn, was a god to be worshipped by all Egyptians. To admit the lie was to give up everything!

After each of Allah's signs, Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام called upon Firawn to bow to Allah and the right path, and free the Children of Israel. Each time they received only abuse and persecution in response.

Again and again Firawn declared there was no other god but himself. He ordered his prime minister, Haman, to build a tower as high as the highest heavens so he could look down upon the god of Musa عليه السلام, for, as he insisted, he was sure Musa عليه السلام was lying.

Musa عليه السلام and Harun عليه السلام warned Firawn that Allah would punish him and his followers for their disbelief. And Allah did so; a series of plagues descended on the people of Egypt.

Ignoring Firawn's angry threats, he turned to the people: "I warn you, my people, against the day when you will turn and flee, with none to defend you against Allah. He whom Allah confounds has none to guide him. Long before this, Yusuf came to you with clear signs, but you never ceased to doubt them.... Those who dispute Allah's revelations, without any authority, are loathed by Allah and by the faithful. Thus Allah seals up the heart of every scornful tyrant."

17. Frogs, Flies and the Red River

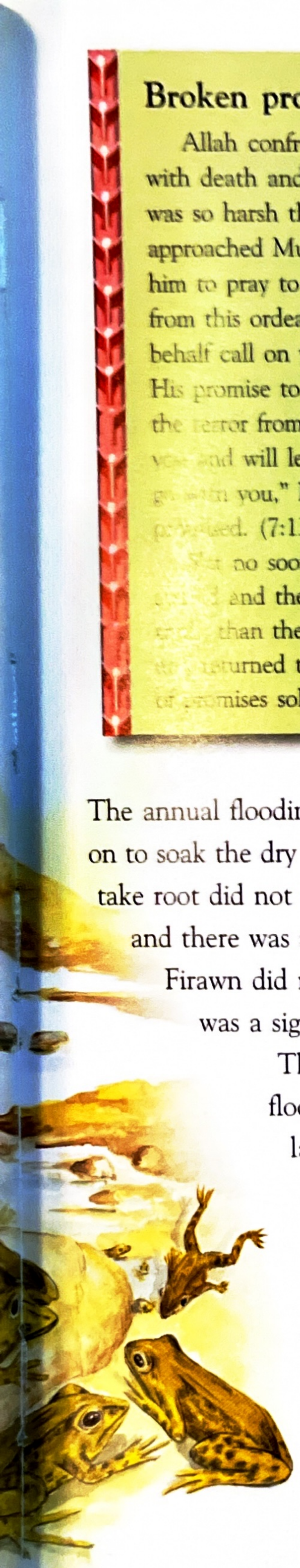
When Allah first called Musa عليه السلام to His service, he told Musa عليه السلام to speak gently to Firawn as he may take heed and fear Allah's power. But Firawn spurned Allah's admonitions arrogantly and ruthlessly, and as a result Allah's signs and warnings grew more terrible.

A series of plagues struck Egypt. First, as a warning of the kind of punishment to come, Allah reduced the waters of the Nile.

Broken promises

Allah confronted the Egyptians with death and famine. The suffering was so harsh that Firawn's men approached Musa ﷺ and implored him to pray to Allah to deliver them from this ordeal. "O Musa! On our behalf call on your Lord in virtue of His promise to you. If you remove the terror from us, we surely will trust you and will let the Children of Israel go with you," Firawn's emissaries pleaded. (7:134)

But no sooner had one plague ended and they were relieved from their misery than they promptly forgot their promise and returned to the old evil ways. This cycle of promises solemnly made and then quickly broken occurred with each new plague. The Children of Israel were prisoners of Firawn's merciless pride. How long could they bear up under the burden?



The annual flooding that farmers depended on to soak the dry land so their crops could take root did not take place. Crops failed, and there was a famine in the land. But Firawn did not understand that this was a sign of Allah.

Then Allah caused a huge flood that overwhelmed the land.

A swarm of flies and locusts flew over the land in a dense black cloud and devoured all the crops. There was nothing green left in the fields and orchards in the whole of Egypt.

Yet another plague followed: millions of lice crawled and seethed over every human being and animal that lived in Egypt. Epidemics raged throughout the land.

Then came a plague of frogs. Across Egypt, frogs came hopping out of rivers, streams and ponds by the millions. They hopped everywhere, on the streets, in the houses, on the food, and even slithered inside the beds. These were clear warnings from the Almighty to Firawn and his people to reconsider their ways.

Finally, the life-giving water of the river Nile, which supplied all Egypt, turned red, like blood. All the fish died, and the dead fish rotted in the sun and stank. For days the whole of Egypt ran with this horrible red coloured water, and there was a great scarcity of water to drink.

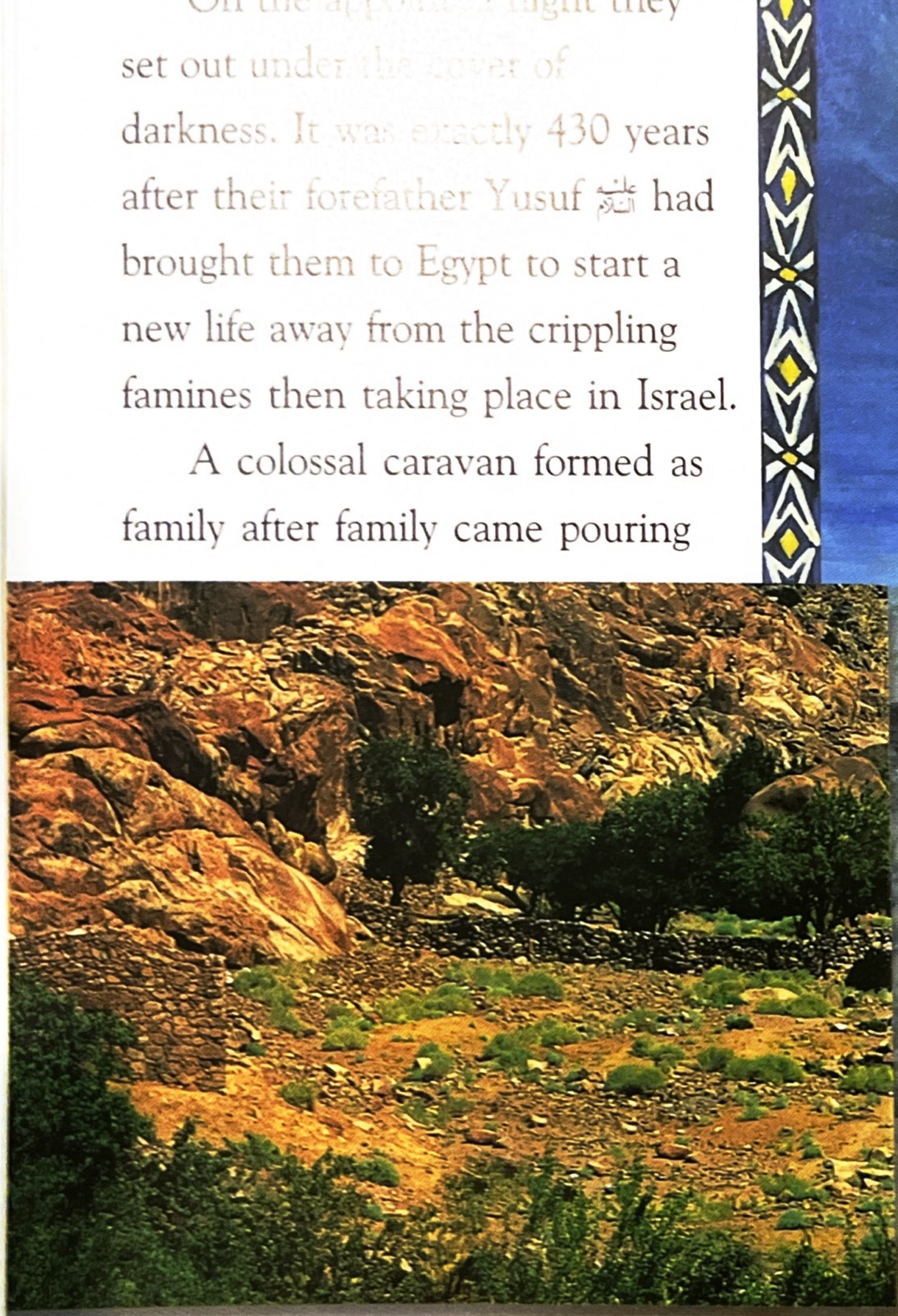
18. "My Lord is With Me"

Firawn was intransigent. And, as his efforts to crush the Israelites reached a fever pitch, the Prophet Musa عليه السلام was finally commanded by Allah to lead His followers out of Egypt. Musa عليه السلام told the Children of Israel to prepare for the difficult journey in secrecy, so as not to provoke suspicion.

On the appointed night they set out under the cover of darkness. It was exactly 430 years after their forefather Yusuf عليه السلام had brought them to Egypt to start a new life away from the crippling famines then taking place in Israel.

A colossal caravan formed as family after family came pouring out of their homes—thousands and thousands of men, with their wives and children, with their flocks and herds, and their jugs and blankets, and all the possessions they could easily carry.

There was tremendous excitement in



▲ **Mount Sinai**

the air. At last they seemed to be freed from Firawn, who had worked them so hard and treated them so harshly. By day and night, they moved slowly but steadily through the desert like a moving city.

They did not take the usual northern route from the city of Ramseses, but proceeded through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Musa عليه السلام had received assurance from the Lord that they would be protected on their journey. Allah told Musa عليه السلام: "Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, without fear of being overtaken (by Firawn) and without (any other) fear." (20:77)

When news of the Israelites' exodus reached Firawn, he was livid. "They are but a puny band, who have provoked us much. But we have numerous fighting men and are well-prepared," he shouted. Firawn himself led the huge army, with many chariots, horsemen and soldiers, in pursuit of Musa عليه السلام and his followers.

The Israelites had almost reached the sea when someone spotted a cloud of dust on the horizon to their back. Terror rippled through the caravan. With the sea in front of them and Firawn's soldiers advancing from behind, they saw no escape. "Oh, we are besieged! We are surely undone!"

19. ...And the Sea Splits

In panic and fear the Israelites accused Musa عليه السلام of betrayal: have you led us out of Egypt for nothing? It would have been better to be slaves to the Egyptians than to die out here in the wilderness as is certainly our fate, they wailed.

But Musa عليه السلام remained calm and patient and tried to comfort them saying, "By no means! My Lord is with me! Soon will He guide me!" (26:62)

As the troops and chariots of Firawn drew nearer, hemming them in, Allah told Musa عليه السلام to strike the sea with his staff. And He comforted the Children of Israel, saying: "Have no fear of being overtaken, nor let anything dismay you." (20:77)

The Red Sea ▶

The Children of Israel were trapped between the sea and the onrushing soldiers of Firawn. They were saved by a miracle of Allah. Most historians now believe that this occurred at a shallow body of water called the Reed Sea (Papyrus Sea) that must have been located in the northeastern corner of Egypt, perhaps near the northern end of the Red Sea.

No sooner did Musa عليه السلام lift his staff and strike the sea than an unusual thing began to happen—a miracle such as had never been seen before. In front of their very eyes, the waves of the sea began to split into two halves with a thunderous uproar. Each side rose as high as a mountain. What an astounding scene! Everyone was struck dumb at Allah's amazing power!

A safe path across the seabed had opened up. The Israelites all thanked their Lord while crossing the sea by the dry path made especially by Allah at this moment of great peril. While the caravan moved across the sea, the water stood stationary on each side, like huge walls of costal, foaming at the top.

Musa عليه السلام and his followers were barely across when Firawn and his army reached the banks behind them. Unmoved by Allah's miracle, Firawn decided to pursue Musa عليه السلام and the Children of Israel further. He ordered his soldiers forward, and they galloped triumphantly down the banks and plunged on into the seabed.

20. Firawn Is Drowned

No sooner did Firawn and his whole army reach the middle of the sea, than the waves standing obediently on either side like huge walls were returned to their original form by Allah's order and fell on them. Firawn and all his army were crushed and drowned in the raging seas.

Seeing his tragic end, Firawn realized that he had been wrong about Musa عليه السلام and his message. At the last moment Firawn turned to Allah and cried out: "Now, I believe that no god exists except Allah in whom the Children of Israel believe. To Him I give up myself." But Allah rejected his last-minute confession, "Only now! But before this you were a rebel and a wrongdoer." (10:90-91) After Firawn drowned, his dead body was apparently taken out of the sea and, according to the old Egyptian custom, was mummified.

As the people looked on at the destruction of the Egyptians from the safety of the Sinai Peninsula, Musa عليه السلام encouraged them not to forget this day. "Remember Allah's goodness to you when He delivered you from Firawn's nation, who had oppressed you cruelly, putting your sons to death and sparing only your daughters. Surely that was a great trial from your Lord. For He had declared: 'If you give thanks, I will bestow abundance upon you: but if you deny My

favours, My punishment shall be terrible indeed.'"

Musa عليه السلام warned the Children of Israel: "If you and all mankind prove thankless, He does not need your thanks, though He deserves your praise." (14:6-8)

The Mummy of Firawn ▼

A Quranic prediction

Describing Firawn's death, the Quran says: "This day We will save your body, so that you will become a sign for your successors." (10:92)

This prediction is surprising, because at the time of revelation in the seventh century A.D., a belief dating back 2000 years had prevailed throughout the Holy Land that Firawn and his army had all been drowned on the fateful day when they were pursuing Musa عليه السلام and the Children of Israel across the Red Sea.

"And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them." (Exodus, 14:28).

No one knew that Firawn's body (*badan*) really was intact, and nearly 1400 years had to pass before this fact finally came to light!

It was not until 1898 that Professor Loret found in the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes the 3000 year old mummified remains of Firawn Merenptah, who was in power when Musa عليه السلام returned from Madyan with the Lord's message. He thus proved the accuracy of the Quran.

On July 8, 1907, the archeologist Elliot Smith examined the remains in a careful scientific way. In 1912 he published a book called *The Royal Mummies*, offering proof that the mummy discovered by Loret was indeed that of Firawn, who "knew Moses, resisted his pleas, pursued him as he took flight, and lost his life in the process."

This discovery is a powerful reminder that Allah is a Being both All-Knowing and All-Powerful.

21. Food from Allah

The Children of Israel breathed sighs of relief. They sang songs of praise to their Lord. At last they were truly free of Firawn. They were very thankful to Allah for His miraculous favour.

They proceeded across the harsh Sinai desert in search of a new land in which to settle peacefully. After some time the food they had managed to carry ran out; they were exhausted and hungry.

But Allah watched over them and protected them. Large flocks of quail were driven down from the sky and flew low over their tents. Tired from their flight, the birds rested on the ground near the tents of the Children of Israel, and it was very easy to catch them. The roasted quail meat was delicious.

Another amazing thing happened. When the Israelites got up in the morning, they saw that the ground was covered with small round objects. These bits were a kind of white fresh dew, which the Prophet Musa's followers happily collected and ate. They tasted like sweet biscuits. The Israelites were puzzled and called it *manna*. In this way Allah saw that the Children of Israel obtained food without any exertion on their part.

Other blessings were bestowed on them too. The harsh sun made the desert burning hot by day, so Allah made the clouds give them shade wherever they went. As the days passed, the scarcity of water grew more severe. At Allah's command, Musa عليه السلام struck a rock with his staff. Miraculously, twelve springs gushed forth—one each for the twelve tribes of

▲ **Manna and quails**
The actual manna found to this day in the Sinai region is a gummy saccharine secretion found on a species of tamarisk. It is produced by the puncture of a species of insect like the cochineal, just as lac is produced by the puncture of the lac insect on certain trees in India. As to quails, large flights of them are driven by winds in the Eastern Mediterranean in certain seasons of the year.

the Children of Israel. They drank their fill of the pure spring water and refreshed themselves.

Yet, after some time, instead of being grateful to Allah, the Israelites again began grumbling to Musa عليه السلام. They complained that they were "weary of eating one kind of food," and called to Musa عليه السلام: "Call on your Lord to give us some of the varied produce of the earth, green herbs and cucumbers, corn and lentils and onions."

Musa عليه السلام was astonished at their lack of gratitude. He worried about this tendency of his people to become selfish and greedy and forget about Allah, and he often went off by himself to pray to Allah for guidance to govern his people. As we shall see, Allah answered Prophet Musa's prayers.

▲ **Varied produce of the earth**
The children of Israel were given food from heaven in the form of manna and quail. But instead of being thankful to God for this, they demanded spicy food from Musa عليه السلام — green herbs and cucumbers, corn and lentils and onions.

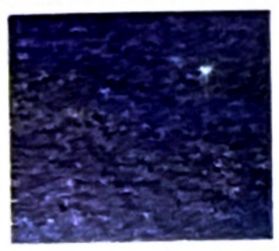
Like little children...

Allah's blessings, meeting our most basic needs, are simple and satisfying, like the quails, manna and springs of water that appeared in the desert. They give us life—the most wondrous gift. But often we are like little children, so keen to have something more that we no longer appreciate what we have. We become selfish and greedy. We forget about others. And we forget about Allah.

Allah specially blessed the Israelites. But instead of giving thanks by always obeying Him, they complained bitterly to Musa عليه السلام, demanding spicy, cooked food and all the fine things of the cities instead of Allah's gifts. Later they even turned their backs on Allah and began worshipping a golden cow and other idols!

Never thanking Allah, being difficult, stubborn and proud is the kind of behaviour that only spreads evil throughout our world, turning us away from Allah's goals. By contrast, gratitude to Allah, humility, not being greedy and being brave when times are difficult, keeps man in tune with nature.

22. With God for Forty Nights



Three months after they had left Egypt, the Children of Israel arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, where Musa عليه السلام had first been called by Allah to His mission. When the camp was set up, Allah told Musa عليه السلام to cleanse himself and prepare for an appointment with Him.

Musa عليه السلام put Harun عليه السلام in charge of the Israelites, entreating him to be strong in holding these wayward people to the right path in his absence.

As Musa عليه السلام and his party of 70 elders moved up the mountain, some among them grumbled: "We will not believe in ·ou unless we see Allah with our own ·es." At this the sky blackened, thunder ·olled and lightning cracked, and the ·arth shook. The Israelites trembled and looked to the ground. They asked Musa عليه السلام to please speak to Allah for them; they were too frightened.

Musa عليه السلام repented before Allah on behalf his people saying, "Had it been Your will, Lord, You could have destroyed them long ago, and myself too…. Forgive us and have mercy on us: You are the noblest of those who forgive." (7:155)

Then Musa عليه السلام went ahead alone into the darkness and thunder to speak with Allah. He spent forty nights on the

The Torah

Musa عليه السلام guided his people through the desert after their escape from Firawn. It was during this journey that Allah gave Musa عليه السلام the Torah, the Holy Book of the Children of Israel. The Torah contains all the laws which the Children of Israel must obey if they are to live their lives in accordance with the will of Allah.

"To Musa We gave the scriptures, a perfect code for the righteous, with precepts about all things, a guide and a mercy, so that they might believe in meeting their Lord." (6:155)

mountain top, and Allah revealed His law and gave him the tablets of stone inscribed with divine rules to be followed to achieve what was best, both in this life and the life to come.

While in conversation with Allah, Musa عليه السلام himself asked to see Him. "You shall not see Me," replied Allah. "But look upon the mountain. If it remains firm upon its base, then only shall you see Me." And when the Lord revealed His Glory to the mountain, it crumbled to dust and

▲ **The Mountain of Sinai**
The Mountain of Sinai (Tur Sinin), a prominent mountain in the Arabian desert, in the peninsula between the two arms of the Red Sea. Here the Ten Commandments and the Law were given to the Prophet Musa. Hence it is now called the Mountain of Moses (Jabal Musa). The Israelites encamped at the foot of it for nearly a year. The Covenant was taken from them under many portents.

Musa عليه السلام swooned. "Glory be to You!" Musa عليه السلام exclaimed when he regained his senses. "Accept my repentance. I am the first to believe." (7:143)

The supreme trial of the human being in this world is that he or she should believe in Allah without actually seeing Him. Even Musa عليه السلام wanted to *see* Allah. But if the greatest bliss of paradise is the sight of the Divine Being, how could it be possible to see Him in this world?

Allah accepted Prophet Musa's repentance: "Musa, I have chosen you of all mankind to make known My messages and My commandments. Take therefore what I have given you, and be thankful." (7:144)

Musa عليه السلام took the stone tablets and went back down to the camp to give the Children of Israel Allah's laws.

23. Touch Me Not!

What Musa عليه السلام found when he returned from Mount Sinai shocked and horrified him. There were the Children of Israel, dancing and shouting in drunken abandon around sacrificial fires, worshipping a golden calf!

Prophet Musa عليه السلام put the tablets aside and angrily addressed his people: "You sinned in my absence! Do you want Allah's punishment to reach you faster?" (7:150) "Didn't your Lord make you a gracious promise? Did my absence eem too long, or was it to anger your Lord hat you failed me?"

Furious, Musa عليه السلام turned on Harun عليه السلام, grabbing him by the hair: "Why didn't you come to find me when you saw this evil? Why did you disobey me?"

Harun عليه السلام protested: "I was afraid you might say: 'You have sown discord among the Children of Israel, and did not wait for my orders.'... The people overpowered me and almost killed me. Don't let my enemies gloat over me; don't brand me a wrongdoer."

Harun عليه السلام explained that he had told the people their Lord was only testing them and He would be merciful. He asked them to follow his guidance. But they replied, "We will worship the golden calf until Musa returns." (20:91) Musa عليه السلام listened, and understood that his brother was innocent.

The man responsible for this turned out to be Samiri (a Samaritan). He spread the rumour that Musa عليه السلام had abandoned the Israelites, and then offered to provide them a new god. He collected their gold ornaments

▲ Mount Sinai

Sinai is also the name of the peninsula of Egypt at the head of the Red Sea between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez. A hot desert, mountainous area, it is also famous as the place where, after he had led the Israelites out of Egypt, Musa عليه السلام was given Allah's laws. But that comes later in our story.

and melted them down into an idol shaped like the bull of Osiris in Memphis in Egypt. With the wind blowing through it, it even made a lowing sound like a bull.

Musa عليه السلام asked Samiri what had come over him. "I saw what they did not," replied Samiri casually. "I took a handful of dust from the messenger's trail and flung it away: thus did my soul prompt me." This was certainly an arrogant reply, and it further angered Musa عليه السلام. "Begone!" cried Musa عليه السلام, and he condemned Samiri to live as an outcast, saying "Touch me not!" to everyone he met, for the rest of his life.

Then Musa عليه السلام burned the golden calf, and scattered its ashes over the sea. (20:95-97) He admonished the Children of Israel: "You have wronged yourselves, my people, in worshipping the calf. Turn in repentance to your Creator and slay the culprits within you." (2:54)

His anger now cooled, Musa عليه السلام took up the tablets, which bore a pledge of guidance and mercy to those who feared their Lord. (7:154)

Musa عليه السلام shuns idol-worship: The yellow heifer

On the journey to the Promised Land, Musa عليه السلام struggled to keep the Children of Israel on the right path. Beset by doubts, they plotted, abused Musa عليه السلام and even returned to idol-worship, an old pagan tradition of Egypt.

Once, seeing some idol-worshippers, they said to Musa عليه السلام: "Make us a god just like theirs." Musa عليه السلام was shocked and scolded them: "Am I to seek for you a deity other than Allah?"

Then he reminded them of how Allah had exalted them above the nations and saved them from Firawn, who had cruelly put their sons to death, sparing only their daughters. (7:138-141)

The Israelites had shown patience during their trial of bondage in Egypt, but now that they were, freed of their bondage they needed to learn true humility before their Lord. This did not come about easily.

Once, a murder took place in their midst. At God's command, Musa عليه السلام asked them to sacrifice a heifer, and strike the corpse with its flesh. Miraculously, the dead man would then arise and name the culprit.

The Israelites asked: "Are you mocking us?" Then they pestered him with insolent questions about what kind of heifer it should be.

Musa عليه السلام said their Lord wanted a yellow, unblemished heifer in its prime, and not one exhausted by farm labour—the kind most revered in pagan idol-worship. Finally, as the Quran tells us (2:71), they slaughtered such an animal, but unwillingly.

But then, their stubbornness worsened. So Allah bade the Children of Israel wander in the desert for another 40 years, so that they should be fit to enter the Promised Land.

24. Meeting al-Khidr

During the long journey to the Promised Land, Prophet Musa عليه السلام too learned many lessons. One of these was from al-Khidr ("the green one"). Probably an angel in the form of a man, al-Khidr had special knowledge and the power to make great changes in the affairs of the world.

Musa عليه السلام set out with his young disciple, Yusha bin Nun. At a certain point the fish they were carrying to eat revived and slipped away into the sea. As predicted, this is where they found al-Khidr. "May I follow you, and be guided by your knowledge?" Musa عليه السلام asked al-Khidr. "Impossible!" said al-Khidr, "For how can you tolerate what is beyond your knowledge?"

Musa عليه السلام replied: "If Allah will, you shall find me patient: I shall in no way cross you." Al-Khidr agreed but warned Musa عليه السلام not to question him about anything until he mentioned it himself.

The two then embarked upon a ship, whereupon al-Khidr bored a hole in it. Musa عليه السلام exclaimed: "Do you want to drown the passengers?"

"Didn't I tell you," replied al-Khidr, "that you would not bear with me?"

"Forgive me," said Musa عليه السلام. "Please don't be angry." They journeyed on until they met a young boy, whom al-Khidr promptly killed. Musa عليه السلام exclaimed: "What wickedness—killing an innocent soul!"

"Didn't I tell you," al-Khidr replied, "that you would not bear with me?" Musa عليه السلام said: "If ever I question you again, abandon me; for then I should deserve it."

Then they came to a city and asked for food, but were refused. Seeing a wall that was crumbling, al-Khidr repaired it, but Musa عليه السلام objected to his doing so without payment.

"Now we must part," said al-Khidr. "But first I will

explain my actions which seemed so dreadful to you. I damaged the ship because it belonged to some poor fishermen and nearby there was a king who plundered every vessel. As for the youth, he would only have distressed his believing parents with his wickedness and unbelief. We prayed that their Lord would replace him with a more righteous and filial son. The wall belonged to two orphans, sons of an honest man in the city. Beneath it their treasure lay buried. Your Lord decreed that they should dig it up when they grew to manhood. What I did was not by my will. That explains what you could not bear to watch with patience." (18:60-82)

All this shows that the highest Divine wisdom sometimes appears to bring calamity. Man's limited knowledge and lack of foresight cause him to grieve over seeming tragedies. But the true believer never flinches at such times, for he knows that the loving hand of Allah unceasingly directs humanity toward the goal of the greatest good. This is the lesson of the story of al-Khidr.

Al-Khidr and the sparrow

While al-Khidr and Musa ﷺ were in the boat, a sparrow perched on its side and dipped its beak once or twice into the water. Al-Bukhari reported al-Khidr's words: "Musa, what I know and what you know has not lessened what Allah knows any more than the waters have been decreased by what the sparrow has drunk."

During the famous meeting between al-Khidr and Musa ﷺ, Allah made it clear that there are different kinds of knowledge—wisdom and understanding—and that He gives them to whomever He wishes, whenever He wishes.

Man's limited knowledge and his inability to see into the future cause him to feel great concern over what he thinks are tragedies. The true believer would never lose heart at such losses, for he would know that the beneficent hand of Allah, that works in nature, unceasingly directs humanity toward the goal of the greatest good.

25. The Promised Land

"Remember, my people, the favour which Allah has bestowed upon you," Musa عليه السلام told his followers when they had finally reached the borders of Palestine. "He has raised up prophets among you, made you kings, and given you that which He has given no other nation. Enter, my people, the holy land which Allah means specially for you. Do not turn back, or you shall be ruined."

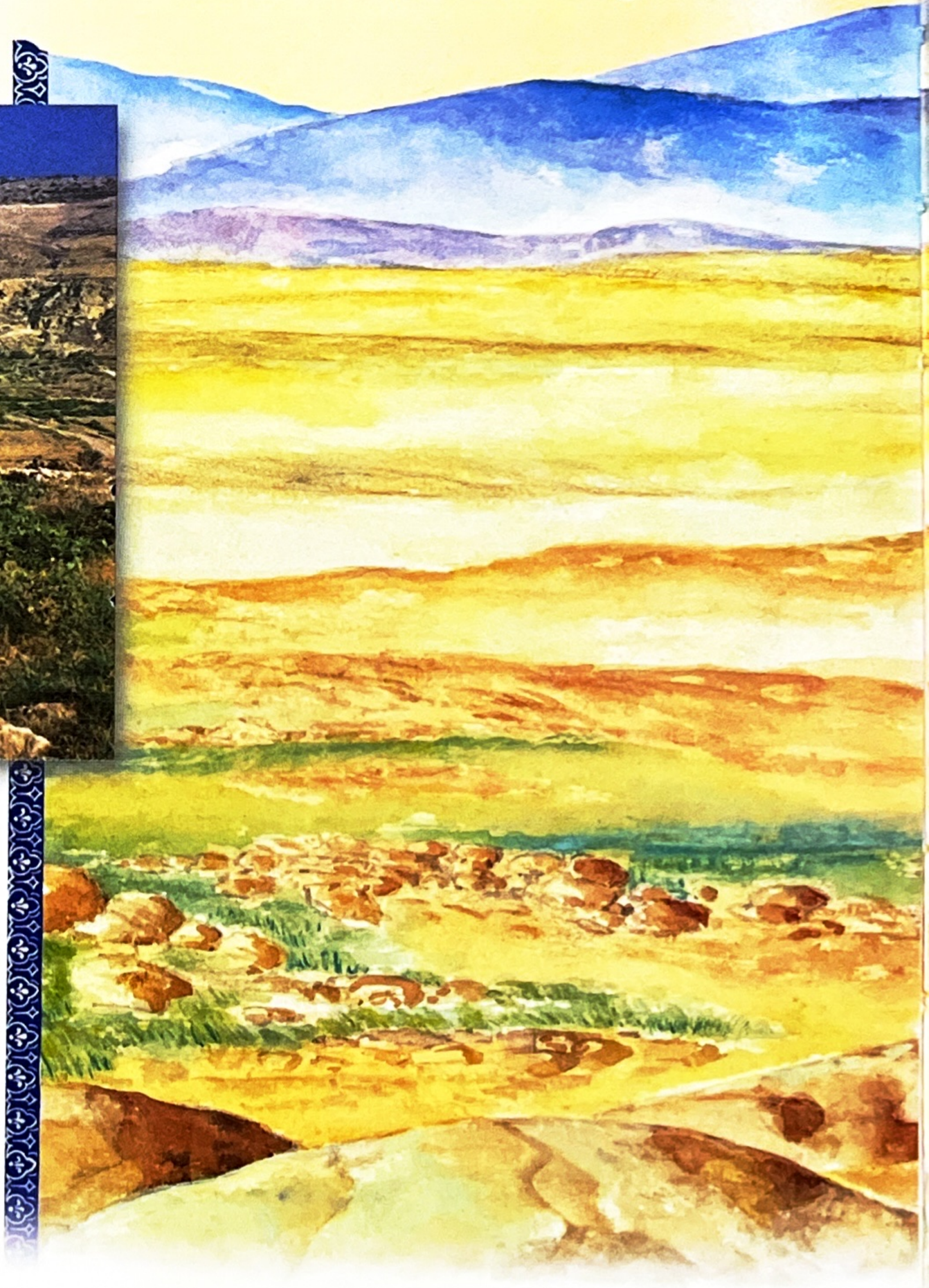
They had faced many trials and difficulties along the way, yet pushed on. Now Prophet Musa's followers shrank back. "Musa," they whined, "a race of giants dwells in this land. We will not set foot in it till they are gone." Musa عليه السلام felt helpless.

Only Yusha bin Nun and Kalab supported Musa عليه السلام. "Go into them through the gates, and when you have entered, you shall surely be victorious," they told the Israelites. "In Allah put your trust, if you are true believers."

But the Israelites dug in their heels. "Musa, we will not go in so long as they are in it. Go, you and your Lord, and fight. Here we will stay," they answered derisively.

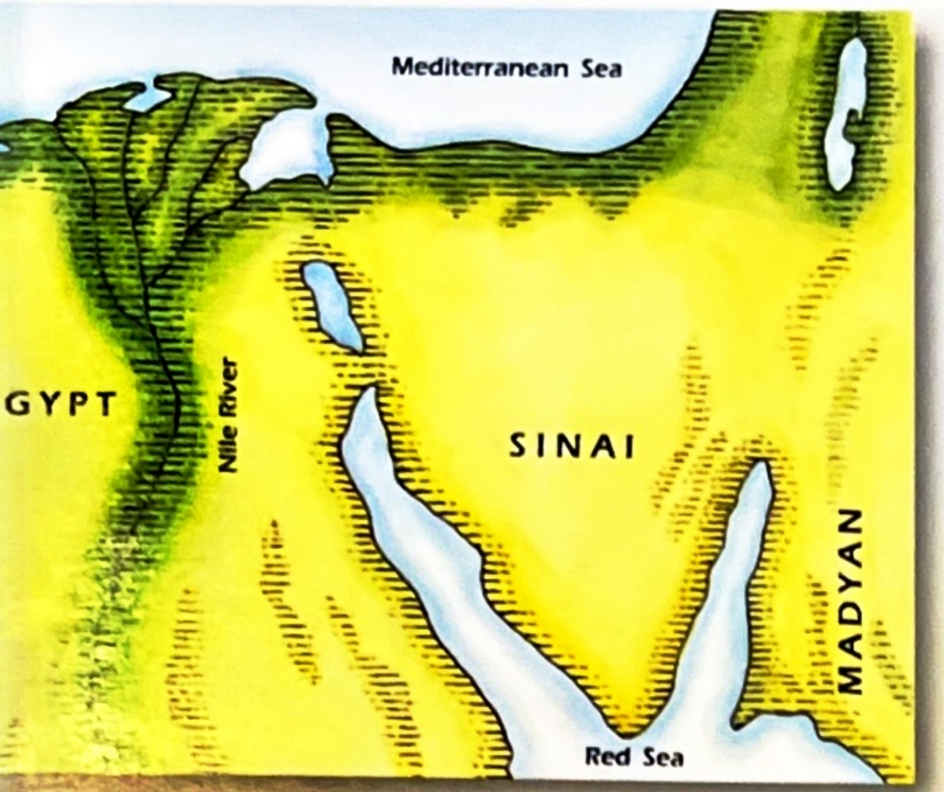
On account of their refusal to confront the inhabitants of Palestine, the Children of Israel had to wander homeless for forty years more. (5:20-26).

It is said that when the Children of Israel finally did enter "the promised land" their great leader Musa عليه السلام was no longer with



▲ The "promised land"

Palestine, or Canaan, as it is also called, had a variety of scenery, from plains and river valleys suited to farming, to lakes and hills, and rocky deserts. During Prophet Musa's time the hills were covered with poplar, oak and sycamore trees. Along the Mediterranean coast and in the Jordan River valley fertile land supported lush crops of pomegranates, grapes and figs. In Palestine, the Israelites, who were experts in tending flocks and living off the land, found people skilled in other crafts and trade, such as stone workers, metal workers, jewelers and musicians. It was all such a contrast to the barren surroundings the Children of Israel had experienced for so long.



...gave the persecuted people dominion over the ...stern and western lands which we had blessed. ...was your Lord's gracious word fulfilled for the ...n of Israel, because they had endured with ...ude; and we destroyed the edifices and the ...ers of Firawn and his people. (7:137)

them. Harun عليه السلام, too, had died, and Musa عليه السلام had made Yusha bin Nun his successor.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that when the Angel of Death was sent to Musa عليه السلام, he hit the angel in the eye, not having recognized him in human form. "You have sent me to a slave who does not want to die," the angel told his Lord. Allah replied: "Go back to him and tell him to put his hand on the back of an ox and for every hair that it covers he will be given another year of life." When the angel had done so, Musa عليه السلام asked, "Oh Lord! What will happen after that?" And he was told, "Death!" So Musa عليه السلام said, "Let it come now." And he asked Allah to let him die close to the Holy Land.

It is said that Musa عليه السلام died on a mountain top overlooking the Jordan Valley. He was then 120 years old.

The Holy Land

The Tribe of Israel spent forty years wandering about aimlessly in the wilderness before they were able to enter the Holy Land of Palestine, where Allah had promised that they would be settled.

This was because they had fallen into the bad habit of questioning the guidance which had been revealed to Musa عليه السلام by Allah, often paying no attention to it whatsoever, and forgetting their promises to Allah. Time after time, Musa عليه السلام had had to remind them of the blessings and punishments that would result from their actions.

When Palestine was finally conquered each of the 12 tribes descended from Prophet Yaqub's sons was given territory. At first they had no king, but were linked together by observance of the laws of Allah given to them by Musa عليه السلام. Some continued for hundreds of years guided by the teachings of Musa عليه السلام. Allah then sent to them a long line of prophets to ensure that they did not alter what Musa عليه السلام had taught.

26. Passages from the Quran

We revealed Our will to Musa's mother, saying: 'Give him suck, but if you are concerned about his safety, then put him down the river. Have no fear, nor be dismayed; for We shall restore him to you and shall invest him with a mission.'

Firawn's household picked him up, so that he might become their adversary and their scourge. For Firawn, Haman, and their warriors were sinners all.

His wife said to Firawn: 'This child may bring joy to us both. Do not slay him. He may show promise, and we may adopt him as our son.' But they little knew what they were doing. (*Surah al-Qasas* 28:7-9)

And when he had reached maturity and grown to manhood We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge. Thus do We reward the righteous.

He entered the town unnoticed by the people, and found two men at each other's throats, the one of his own race, the other an enemy. The Israelite appealed for Musa's help against his enemy, so that Musa struck him with his fist and slew him. 'This is the work of Satan,' said Musa. 'He is the sworn enemy of man and seeks to lead him astray. Forgive me, Lord, for I have sinned against my soul.' (*Surah al-Qasas* 28:14-15)

He went away in fear and caution, saying: 'Lord, deliver me from these evil men.' And as he made his way towards Madyan, he said: 'May the Lord guide me to the even path.'

When he came to the well of Madyan he found around it a multitude of men watering their flocks, and beside them two women who were keeping back their sheep. 'What is it that troubles you?' he asked.

They replied: 'We cannot water them until the shepherds have driven away their flocks. Our father is an aged man.'

Musa watered for them their sheep and then retired to the shade, saying: 'Lord, I surely stand in need of the blessing which you have sent me.'

And when he had fulfilled his term and was journeying with his folk, Musa discovered a fire on the mountain-side. He said to his people: 'Stay here, for I can see a fire. Perhaps I can bring you news, or a lighted torch to warm yourselves with.'

When he came near, a voice called out to him from a bush in a blessed spot on the right side of the valley, saying: 'Musa, I am Allah, Lord of the Universe. Throw down your staff.'

And when he saw it writhing like a serpent, he turned his back and fled, running on and on.

'Musa,' said the voice, 'approach and have no fear. You are safe. Put your hand in your pocket: it will come out white, although unharmed. Now draw back your hand, and do not stretch it out in terror. These are two signs from your Lord for Firawn and his people. Truly, they are sinful men.' (*Surah al-Qasas* 28:29-32)

When he came near, a voice called out to him: 'Musa, I am your Lord. Take off your sandals, for you are now in the sacred valley of Tuwa.

'Know that I have chosen you. Therefore listen to what shall be revealed.

'I am Allah. There is no deity save Me. Serve Me, and recite your prayers in My remembrance.

'The Hour of Doom is sure to come. But I choose to keep it hidden, so that every soul may be rewarded for its labours. Let those who disbelieve in it and yield to their desires not turn your thoughts from it, lest you perish. (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:11-16)

'Lord,' said Musa, 'put courage into my heart, and do not beset my task with hardships. Free my tongue from its impediment, that men may understand my speech. Appoint for me a counsellor from among my kinsmen, Harun my brother. Grant me strength through him and let him share my task, so that we may give glory to You and remember You always. You are surely watching over us.'

He replied: 'Your request is granted, Musa.' (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:25-36)

Go both of you to Firawn, for he has transgressed all bounds. Speak to him with gentle words; he may yet take heed and fear Our punishment.'

'Lord,' they said, 'we dread his malevolence and tyranny.'

He replied: 'Have no fears. I shall be with you. I see all and hear all. (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:43-46)

Musa said: 'Firawn, I am a messenger from the Lord of the Universe, and may tell nothing of Allah but what is true. I bring you a clear sign from your Lord. Let the Children of Israel depart with me.'

He answered: 'Show us your sign, if what you say be true.'

Musa threw down his staff, and thereupon it changed to a veritable serpent. Then he drew out his hand, and it was white to all who saw it. (*Surah al-A'raf* 7:104-108)

To Musa they said: 'Will you first throw down, or shall we?'

'Throw down first,' he answered.

And by their sorcery their cords and staffs appeared to Musa's eyes as though they were running.

Musa was much alarmed. But We said to him: 'Have no fear; you shall surely win. Throw that which is in your right hand. It will swallow up their devices, for their devices are but the deceitful show of sorcery. Sorcerers shall not prosper, whatever they do.' (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:65-69)

Then Musa threw down his staff, and it swallowed their false devices. The sorcerers prostrated themselves in adoration, saying: 'We now believe in the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of Musa and Harun.'

Firawn said: 'Do you dare believe in Him without my consent? This man must be your master, who has taught you witchcraft. But you shall see. I will cut off your hands and feet on alternate sides and crucify you all.'

'That cannot harm us,' they replied, 'for to our Lord we shall return. We trust that He will forgive us our sins, since we are the first who have believed.' (*Surah Ash-Shu'ara* 26:45-51)

They replied: 'Obey you we cannot. Rather will we obey the miracles which we have witnessed and Him who has created us. Therefore do your worst; you can punish us only in this present life. We have put our faith in our Lord so that He may forgive us our sins and the sorcery you have forced us to practise. Better is the reward of Allah, and more lasting. (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:72-73)

Firawn said to Haman, 'Build me a tower that I may reach the highways—the very highways—of the heavens, and look upon the god of Musa. I am convinced that he is lying.' (*Surah al-Mu'min* 40:36-37)

Firawn made a proclamation among his people. 'My people,' said he, 'is the kingdom of Egypt not mine, and are these rivers which flow at my feet not mine also? Can you not see? Am I not better than this despicable wretch, who can scarcely make his meaning plain? Why have no bracelets of gold been given him, or angels sent down to accompany him?' (*Surah az-Zukhraf* 43:51-53)

So We plagued them with floods and locusts, with lice and frogs and blood: clear miracles, yet they scorned them all, for they were a wicked nation.

And when each plague from smote them, they said: 'Moses, pray to your Lord for us: invoke the promise He has made you. If you lift the plague from us, we will believe in you and let the Israelites go with you.'

But when We had lifted the plague from them and the appointed time had come, they broke their promise. (*Surah al-A'raf* 7:133-135)

Qarun was one of Musa's people, but he treated them unjustly. We had given him such treasures that their very keys would have weighed down a band of sturdy men. His people said to him: 'Do not exult in your riches; Allah does not love the exultant. But seek, by means of that which Allah has given you, to attain the abode of the hereafter. Do not forget your share in this world. Be good to others as Allah has been good to you, and do not strive for evil in the land, for Allah does not love the evildoers.'

But he replied: 'These riches were given me on account of the knowledge I possess.'

Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him men who were mightier and more avaricious than he? The wrongdoers shall not be questioned about their sins.

And when he went out in all his finery among his people, those who loved this life said: 'Would that we had the like of Qarun's fortune! He is indeed a lucky man.'

But those who were endowed with knowledge said: 'Alas for you! Better is the reward of Allah for him that has faith and does good works; but none shall attain it save those who have endured with fortitude.'

We caused the earth to swallow him, together with his dwelling, so that he found none to protect him from Allah; nor was he able to defend himself. And those who on the day before had coveted his lot began to say: 'Behold! Allah gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases. But for the grace of Allah, He could have caused the earth to swallow us. Behold! The ungrateful shall never prosper.' (*Surah al-Qasas* 28:76-82)

Then We revealed Our will to Musa, saying: 'Set forth with My servants in the night and strike for them a dry path across the sea. Have no fear of being overtaken, nor let anything dismay you.' (*Surah Ta Ha* 20:77)

At sunrise the Egyptians followed them. And when the two multitudes came in view of each other, Musa's companions said: 'We are surely undone!'

'No,' Musa replied, 'my Lord is with me, and He will guide me.'

We bade Musa strike the sea with his staff, and the sea was cleft asunder, each part as high as a massive mountain. In between We made the others follow. We delivered Musa and all who were with him, and drowned the rest. (*Surah Ash-Shu'ara* 26:60-66)

We caused the clouds to draw their shadow over you and sent down for you manna and quails, saying: 'Eat of the good things We have given you.' Indeed, they did not wrong Us, but they wronged themselves.

'Enter this city,' We said, 'and eat where you will to your hearts' content. Make your way reverently through the gates, saying: "We repent." We shall forgive you your sins and bestow abundance on the righteous among you.' (*Surah Al Imran* 2:57-58)

When Musa requested water for his people We said to him: 'Strike the Rock with your staff.' Thereupon twelve springs gushed from the Rock, and each tribe knew their drinking-place. We said: 'Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not foul the land with evil.'

'Musa,' you said, 'we will no longer put up with this monotonous diet. Call on your Lord to give us some of the varied produce of the earth, green herbs and cucumbers, corn and lentils and onions.' (*Surah Al Imran* 2:60-61)

We promised Musa thirty nights, to which We added ten nights more: so that the appointment with his Lord was after forty nights.

Musa said to his brother Harun: 'Take my place among my people. Do what is right and do not follow the path of the wrongdoers.'

And when Musa came at the appointed time and His Lord communed with him, he said: 'Lord, reveal Yourself to me, that I may look upon You.'

He replied: 'You shall not see Me. But look upon the Mountain; if it remains firm upon its base, then only shall you see Me.'

And when his Lord revealed Himself to the Mountain, He levelled it into dust. Musa fell down senseless, and, when he regained his senses, said: 'Glory be to You! Accept my repentance. I am the first of believers.'

He replied: 'Musa, I have chosen you of all mankind to make known My messages and My commandments. Take therefore what I have given you, and be thankful.'

We inscribed for him upon the Tablets all manner of precepts, and instructions concerning all things, and said to him: 'Observe these steadfastly, and enjoin your people to observe what is best in them. I shall show you the home of the wicked. (*Surah al-Araf* 7:142-145)

And when Musa returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, he said: 'Evil is the thing you did in my absence! Would you hasten the retribution of your Lord?'

He put down the Tablets and, seizing his brother by the hair, dragged him closer.

'Son of my mother,' cried Harun, 'the people overpowered me and almost did me to death. Do not let my enemies gloat over me; do not number me among the wrongdoers.'

'Lord,' said Musa, 'forgive me and forgive my brother. Admit us to Your mercy, for, of all those that show mercy, You are the most merciful.'

Those that worshipped the calf incurred the anger of their Lord and disgrace in this life. Thus shall the faithless be rewarded. As for those that do evil but later repent and have faith, they shall find your Lord forgiving and merciful.

When his anger was allayed, Musa took up the Tablets, upon which was inscribed a pledge of guidance and of mercy to those that fear their Lord. (*Surah al-A'raf* 7:150-154)

Musa said to him (Khidr): 'May I follow you, so that you may guide me by that which you have been taught?

'You will not bear with me,' replied the other. 'For how can you bear with that which is beyond your knowledge?'

Musa said: 'If God wills, you shall find me patient: I shall in no way cross you.'

He said: 'If you are bent on following me, you must not question me about anything until I mention it to you myself.'

The two set forth, but as soon as they embarked, Musa's companion bored a hole in the bottom of the ship.

'Is it to drown her passengers that you have bored a hole in her?' Musa asked, 'A strange thing you have done.'

'Did I not tell you,' he replied, 'that you would not bear with me?'

'Pardon my forgetfulness,' said Musa. 'Do not be angry with me on account of this.'

They journeyed on until they fell in with a certain youth. Musa's companion slew him, and Musa said: 'You have killed an innocent youth who has done no harm. Surely you have done a wicked thing.'

'Did I not tell you,' he replied, 'that you would not bear with me!'

Musa said: 'If ever I question you again, abandon me; for then I should deserve it.'

They travelled on until they came to a city. They asked the people for some food, but they declined to receive them as their guests. There they found a wall on the point of falling down. His companion restored it, and Musa said: 'Had you wished, you could have demanded payment for your labours.'

'Now has the time arrived when we must part,' said the other. 'But first I will explain to you those acts of mine which you could not bear to watch with patience.

'Know that the ship belonged to some poor fishermen. I damaged it because in the rear there was a king who was taking every ship by force.

'As for the youth, his parents both are true believers, and we feared lest he should plague them with his wickedness and unbelief. It was our wish that their Lord should grant them another in his place, a son more righteous and more filial.

'As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city whose father was an honest man. Beneath it their treasure is buried. Your Lord decreed, as a mercy from your Lord, that they should dig up their treasure when they grew to manhood. What I did was not done by my will.

'That is the meaning of what you could not bear to watch with patience.' (*Surah al-Kahaf* 18:66-82)

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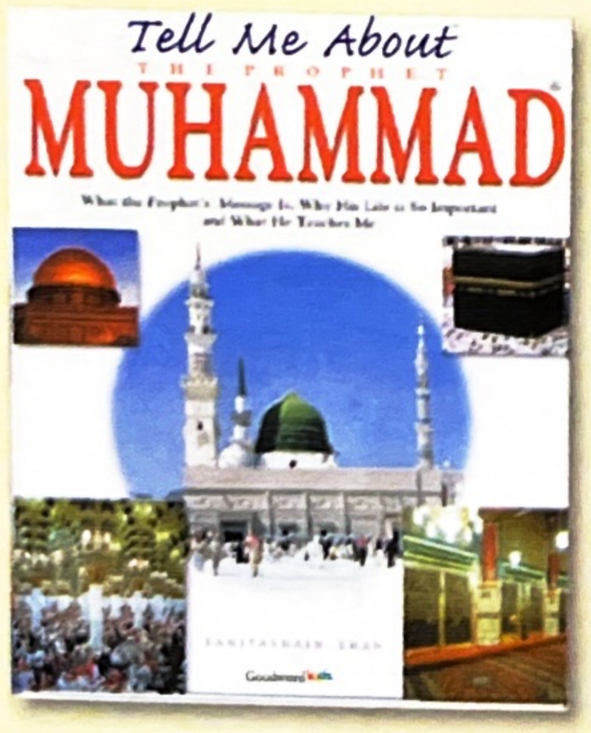
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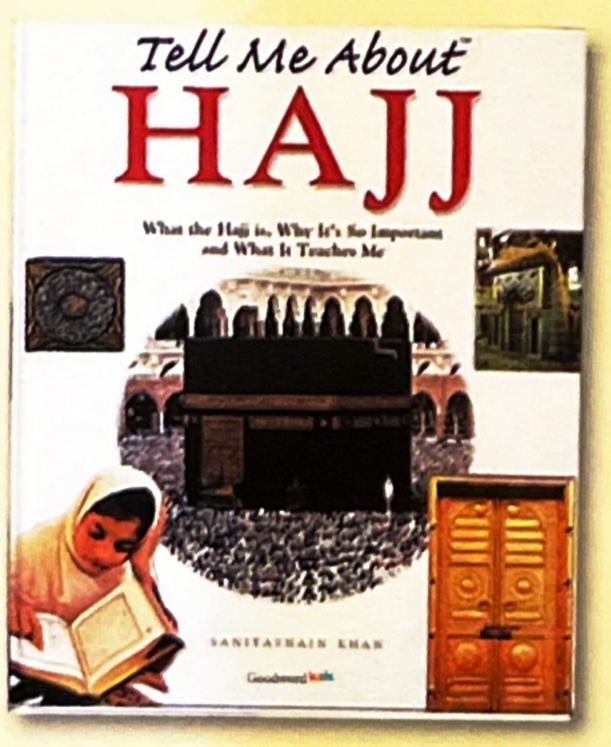

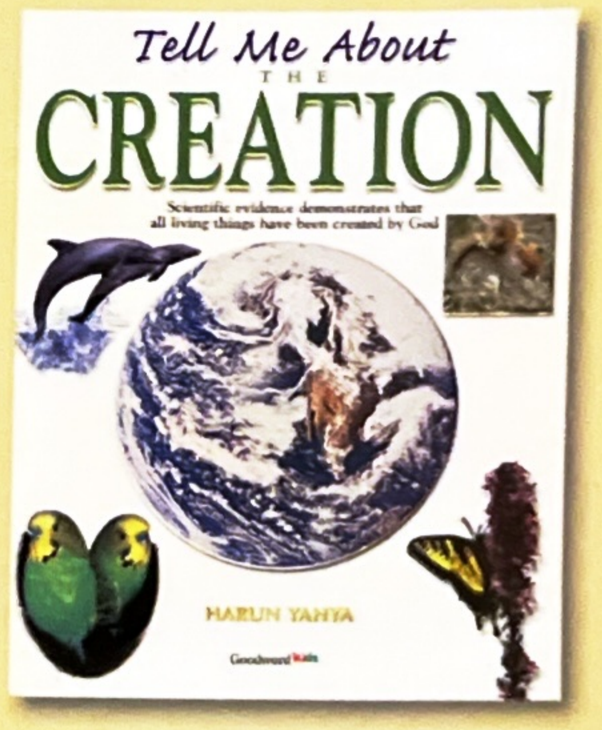

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